

# **THE ROLE OF PARENTS AS PARTNERS IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS: A Case Study at a Primary School in Isipingo**

**by  
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

In the School of Education  
Discipline of Educational Psychology  
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL (Edgewood Campus)  
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**2014**

### **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I, Deviasagrie Padayachee, declare that this dissertation is my own. It is being submitted for the Degree of the Master of Education at The University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). It has not been submitted before, for examination at any other university.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The increasing level of interest in parental involvement policy and practice in South African education has evoked many questions. Some of them are: What do we really know about the impact of parental involvement on children's academic progress? What research has already been undertaken to support or refute the argument that parents play an important role as partners in the education process? What level of parental involvement are we talking about? And why are parents not adequately involved in their children's education? From the research evidence studied, both Epstein (1997) and Bronfenbrenner (1986) draw convincing conclusions about the positive effects of parental involvement on learners' scholastic performance.

Against this background, the study investigated parents' understanding of parental involvement. Furthermore, it sought to identify challenges and barriers impacting on parental involvement and to find possible ways to overcome these barriers. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was used. Data production methods included interviews and questionnaires. Nine participants were interviewed. Questionnaires consisting of thirteen questions were administered to all participants. Their responses were transcribed and analysed.

The study revealed that time constraints, illiteracy, lack of communication between home and school and poverty are among other contributing factors to lack of parental involvement in the school under study. Parental involvement, according to this study is greater amongst parents who are teachers than other parents. Other parents seem to be more involved in the communication about school rather than the actual school activities. This level of involvement is clearly insufficient to influence the learner's scholastic performance in a positive manner. The results of this study concede with the claims made by both Epstein (1997) and Bronfenbrenner (1996) that parents are indeed important partners in education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The culmination of two long years of research and the successful completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support and guidance of so many people. My heartfelt thanks and appreciation go out to the following individuals:

1. The **Divine Intelligence** for giving me the wisdom and determination to fulfil this dream.
2. My dearest husband **Shalen** and my two precious gems, **Priyanka** and **Pranav**, for affording me the opportunity and the space to pursue my studies.
3. My domestic helper **Zuziwe** who kept the home-fire burning whilst I followed my dream.
4. My supervisor, **Dr. Ntombela** for her expertise and guidance.
5. My fellow students **Areshni** and **Nalini** for their continuous support.
6. **Rajen Reddy** for his editorial input.
7. My **former principal, colleagues** and **parents** who participated in this study, many thanks for your invaluable input.
8. All other **family, friends** and **colleagues** who have encouraged and motivated me through the years to persevere in realising this dream.

## **MY DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved parents,  
**CHIN and LUCY NAIDOO,**  
whose warmth and loving spirit sustains me still.  
It was their unconditional love, unstinting support and belief in  
me that has made me who I am today.

I will continue to bring honour to their rich legacy in every  
breathe that I take and every step that I make.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

*When both parents and teachers work together, communicate and build a family and school partnership, parents, teachers and children benefit from the outcome (Gelfer, 1991, p167)*

Senechal and LeFevre (2002) agree that when examining ways to improve the scholastic performance of children, it is crucial for this to be partnered with family involvement. Parents are seen as the primary educators of their children from birth and as a result possess valuable information in respect of delivery, development and milestones attained by the child from birth to school. This in turn needs to be discussed with the school as it serves as invaluable information to assist the teacher create a better understanding of the learner and his performance. This constant three-way partnership and interaction according to LaRocque, Kleiman and Darling (2011) can produce a positive ripple effect on the success of the parent, school and learner.

In the transformational South Africa, the Department of Education has legislated parents as an important part of the education process aiming to promote a significant change in parental participation. SASA 84 (DoE, 1996), defined a parent; outlined their basic duties; set out requirements for schools to make information accessible to parents and made it compulsory for parents to serve on school governing bodies (Lemmer and van Wyk, 2006). These developments aimed to create partnerships between parents and schools with the aim of developing a more learned South Africa.

Even though parental involvement has received much attention recently, according to Hoover-Dempsey, Battatio and Walker (2001), stronger parental involvement is not a reality in South Africa. Due to factors like diverse cultures, socio-economic

status, lack of parents' educational skills and language barriers, to name a few, parents' are likely to face barriers that hinder their participation in the education of their children.

## **1.2 Context of the study**

The researcher's vast experience as a teacher (spanning over two decades) has confirmed that there is a distinct decline in the level of parental involvement in the education process. There has also been an outcry from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education that the major part of the province is experiencing a lack of parental involvement (The Independent, 2004 as cited in Maphanga, 2006).

The increased level of interest in parental involvement policy and practice in South African education, has invoked many questions surrounding this discourse, namely, what do we really know about the impact of parental involvement on the child's scholastic performance? What research supports or refutes the argument that parents are important role-players in the education process? What level of parental involvement are we talking about? This has led the researcher to embark on the very relevant, very crucial topic for this dissertation, aiming to shed more light on the status quo of parental involvement in South Africa.

## **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The study sought to do the following:

- a) To explore parents' understandings of parental involvement.
- b) To identify challenges or barriers impacting on parental involvement.
- c) To identify strategies that can be used to promote parental involvement.

To realise these objectives, the study attempted to answer the following critical questions:

1. What are parents' understandings of parental involvement?
2. What are the challenges impacting on parental involvement?
3. What strategies can be used to promote parental involvement?

#### **1.4 Relevance of the study**

The reality of parental involvement is summarised succinctly by Henderson and Berla (1994, p18) who state that even though “the benefits of effective collaborations and how to do them are well documented across all the age ranges of schooling, it is still not widespread in practice”

SASA (DoE, 1996) enhanced the role of parents in education. Although its purpose was focused on improving governance, it did little to improve the academic achievement of children. The introduction of School Governing Bodies as an intervention towards improved school governance clearly only involves a few parents that are members of the School Governing Body. Interaction with parents on this level may not have a direct link with the actual improvement of the learners' scholastic performance.

As a parent, a teacher and now a researcher, it is important to understand parents' reluctance, whether intentional or not, to engage positively in their children's education. This study will give insight into what parents as well as teachers understand about parental involvement. Furthermore, the findings could be used to guide all educational stakeholders in developing effective ways of getting parents more involved in playing meaningful roles in education. It will also provide suggestions on how to improve parental involvement as “parent participation is a cost-effective and feasible way to improve the culture of teaching and learning so needed in South Africa” (Lemmer, 2007, p. 227)

Whilst the importance of parental involvement is well documented globally, there is very little literature on the nature and the influence of parents' involvement on their children's academic performance in African schools (Ibrahim and Jamil, 2012).

Most of the research concerning parental involvement has been undertaken overseas therefore there is a definite gap which this study hopes to fill.

### **1.5 Research Design and Methodology**

According to Henning, Gravett and Van Rensberg (2005), the research design of any study is a sequence of logic that connects the empirical data to the research questions in the study and finally with its conclusion.

This study used the qualitative research approach to explore the role of parents as partners in education. The researcher selected this approach for this study as it aimed to explore parents' understanding of parental involvement, the challenges that impact on parental involvement and the strategies that can be used to promote parental involvement.

Using this approach, the researcher is able to gain an in-depth knowledge of the topic by getting rich descriptions of the way parents' get involved in the education of their children. According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993), the qualitative approach is a systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions concerning individuals in a bounded social context. Qualitative research methods usually include observations and interviews but can also include surveys, historical document analyses and case studies.

The case study research method chosen for this study is excellent in bringing an understanding of a complex issue and can add strength to what is already familiar through previous research. An interpretivist perspective of a case study is that it directs the researcher towards a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of how participants interact and relate to each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon being studied (Maree, 2007). Furthermore, it emphasizes the analyses of words rather than numbers.

The school as a research site together with the participants in the study were selected by purposive sampling. The purposive sampling method used focuses on

specific participants who contain rich information, based on the purpose of the study (Maree, 2007). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) argue that the purposive sampling method is most suitable for small scale research, less complicated to set up and considerably less expensive. Thus, this type of sampling seemed most suitable for the purpose of this study as this was a small scale research with only nine participants.

Semi-structured interviews comprising of open-ended questions were used to collect data from nine parents from the same school. For the purpose of attaining different perspectives on parental involvement, the researcher used three natural or biological parents, three guardians and three teachers who are parents, as part of the sample. The interpretivist research paradigm uses the interview method extensively and in this study each of the participants engaged in an interview with the researcher in a neutral, relaxed atmosphere. The perspective is that humans create their own reality in a natural setting (Maree, 2007).

The interview method was used in this study to explore parents' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement; to identify challenges impacting on parental involvement and to identify strategies that can be used to promote parental involvement.

People often behave and respond in more complex ways than plants and animals. The way in which a person responds in a given situation depends largely on their past experiences and circumstances. Thus their context is very important and in the interpretive paradigm, researchers do not aim to predict what people will do, but rather to describe how people make sense of their worlds. The results are not out there waiting to be found or discovered by the researcher, but they are created through interpretation of data (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The interpretive perspective leads to a stronger emphasis on what has become known as naturalistic research. Naturalistic research is conducted in naturally occurring contexts with the researcher aiming to be non-intrusive (Cohen *et al.*). The researcher needs to engage the situation from the viewpoint of the participants.

A questionnaire consisting of 13 questions was administered to all nine participants. This gave them a chance to express their opinions, needs and apprehensions in respect of their involvement. Thereafter, transcripts of the responses were compiled for each participant and analysed according to the thematic approach which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

## **1.6 Definition of Terminology**

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study:

1.6.1 'PARENTS' – A parent is a caretaker of the offspring in their own species. In humans, a parent is the caretaker and the offspring is the child. In a South African context it is more appropriate to define parents as one who gives birth to, begets or nurtures and raises a child. SASA (DoE, 1996), defines the term parent as:

- a) The learner's natural parent
- b) The learner's guardian.
- c) A legal custodian (physical control) of a learner.
- d) A person who undertakes to act as a parent of a learner for the purpose of the learners' education at school.

1.6.2 'PARTNERS' are those who enter into an agreement to co-operate to advance their mutual interests.

1.6.3 'EDUCATIONAL PROCESS' is to provide knowledge to a student or learner and in most cases consist of:

- a) Providing information.
- b) Re-inforcement through exercise.
- c) Clarification and reviewing of material.
- d) Testing to verify learning.

1.6.4 'PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT' is when parents and/or other significant adults share in their formal education.



1.6.5 'CASE STUDY' is an intensive, in-depth analysis of an individual unit e.g. a person, group, event, projects, policies, institutions or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more method. Case studies may be descriptive or explanatory and it is also known as a case report.

1.6.6 'BARRIER' according to the Macmillan dictionary (2009), is defined as:

- a) Anything that prevents progress or makes it difficult for someone to achieve something.
- b) Something that prevents people communicating or working together.

## **1.7 Context and sampling**

The context within which this study was conducted was specifically in a primary school in the south of Durban. The enrolment of learners at the school comprised of 90% black whilst the other 10% consisted of Indian and coloured learners. Parents from low socio-economic status homes made up 70% of the parent population.

The group of participants from which data was gathered was referred to as a sample, according to Cohen *et al.* The participants in this study were nine parents (three of whom were guardians).

The motivation behind the researcher's decision to include three guardians in the sample of parents was the fact that the HIV prevalence rate in South Africa is the highest amongst blacks (Kalichman and Simbayi, 2003). Furthermore, statistics reveal that South Africa has the highest number of HIV infected individuals in the world. Thus, the existence of guardians raising learners is a common reality in South African schools, especially in the school where the research is being conducted.

Another reality in third-world countries like South Africa, according to Fryer (2006), is that 48.5% of parents live below the poverty line. With the existence of high

rates of unemployment and poverty, parents from these low socio-economic backgrounds are preoccupied with survival. Many leave home in search of work and their children are raised by guardians.

Thus, the sample is representative of the school population. The researcher, however, targeted this group fully aware that it is not representative of the wider population, therefore, there will be no attempt to generalise the findings.

## **1.8 Data Production, Techniques and Procedures**

The data was collected to determine what parents understand by parental involvement and to establish how this can impact on their children's academic progress. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three parents and three teachers who are parents. A convenient time and a neutral environment were negotiated in order to minimise disruption to teaching and learning. Face to face, independent, once-off interviews were undertaken.

### **1.8.1 Data Analysis**

Qualitative researchers are involved with the integration of the operations of organising, analysing, and interpreting data and call the entire process "data analysis" (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993). Miles and Huberman (1994) define data analysis as a three-fold process, namely, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing.

Data reduction involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data. For the purpose of this study transcripts were written from the audio recordings of participants' responses.

Data display is an organised, compressed collection of information that allows the researcher to draw conclusions and this can be found in Table 1 (p. 59). Other condensed forms of displays like graphs, charts, matrices or networks are simple and will lead to better qualitative analysis.

The third stage of data analysis is conclusion drawing. This process actually starts at the beginning of data collection when the researcher notes patterns and possible explanations. The fact that the researcher, at the outset, noticed a decline in parental involvement and identified a few barriers that are likely to contribute to this phenomenon meant that conclusion drawing had already begun. However, the final conclusion is done once the analysis is complete.

## **1.9 Ethical Issues**

Section 9(3) of the Bill of Rights (Devenish, 1999) maintains that no individual may be discriminated against; therefore it is important that all research studies abide by certain ethical principles. These principles of autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence provide a set of moral commitments.

Respect for autonomy is the moral obligation to respect the autonomy of participants. It involves consulting and communicating with all participants by firstly explaining fully what the research entails and what is expected of them and thereafter obtaining an informed consent from each one that he or she is willing to participate in the research. Respect for autonomy was maintained when written permission was sought by the researcher from the Department of Education to conduct research at the school.

Another way of respecting autonomy is by maintaining confidentiality. In this study pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of each participant. Participants were also asked to sign the written transcripts of the audio interview recordings as a true reflection of what had been communicated during the interview process. This serves to reassure the participants of the researcher's integrity to adhere to ethical research procedures and to report on the research findings in a truthful manner.

In any study involving human beings, the researcher inevitably runs the risk of harming them either physically or emotionally. Non-maleficence means that the

researcher should do no harm to the participants or to any person involved in the research (Durrheim and Wassenaar, 2002). In this study, all participants were informed in writing that their participation was totally voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time if they felt that they are being prejudiced or harmed at any stage in this study.

Researchers need to consider the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence together, thus aiming to produce net benefit over harm. They must ensure that they deliver the benefits that their studies aim to provide. This study professes to provide suggestions and recommendations that would benefit the parent and most importantly, the learner. Thus, the researcher must go to great lengths to ensure that this promise is honoured.

Furthermore, the researcher needs to be clear about probability and risk when considerations are being made about benefits and harm. The moral recognition of non-maleficence and beneficence on the part of the researcher will further enhance the autonomy of the participant.

### **1.10 Structure of study**

This study is divided into six chapters. These chapters are as follows:

Chapter one serves as an introduction to the study. It has provided the purpose and rationale of the study. The importance of parental involvement in education was highlighted and terminology defined. In addition, ethical considerations were discussed.

Chapter Two comprises of a review of the literature used to support arguments relating to the role of the parent as a partner in the education process. The different forms of parental involvement as postulated by the different researchers were discussed. The benefit of parental involvement to both the learner and the parent was looked at and finally the barriers to parental involvement were identified.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The researcher uses the Eco-systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and the Theory of overlapping spheres (Epstein, 1987) as the basis for this study.

Chapter Four describes the research process followed. The research site and samples were discussed. The reliability and validity of the research was examined. In addition, ethical considerations were made and limitations of the study were looked at.

Chapter Five presents the data collected and the analysis thereof.

In Chapter Six, the main findings of the study are presented, discussed and summarised. Recommendations are made on how the school can enhance parental involvement based on the findings of this study.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

The role of parents as partners in education cannot be stressed enough. The Department of Education has made attempts in terms of legislation and curriculum changes to encourage parents to become more involved, yet this has not been adequately achieved. There are many barriers that hinder high levels of parental involvement. Schools can play an important role in promoting parental involvement by overcoming barriers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*When schools and families work together, a partnership of support for children develops. Education becomes a shared venture, characterized by mutual respect and trust in which the importance and influence of each partner is recognized. Although children, families, teachers, and schools benefit individually, their partnership enhances the entire process of education (Burns, 1993)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the extensive literature on the involvement of parents in their children's education. The positive effects of this involvement are reported by both parents and teachers and the vast theoretical models serve as guidelines for its implementation. The reality of parental involvement is, however, quite different because while "the benefits of effective collaborations and how to do them are well documented across all the age ranges of schooling, it is still not widespread in practice" (Henderson and Berla, 1994, p. 18)

Understanding parental involvement comprises of varied concepts that differ from country to country. In the first world countries like Canada, legislation regulates parental involvement (Halfon and Friendly, 2013). In South Africa, SASA (DoE, 1996) stipulates that parents serve on the school governing body. However, this level of involvement may not necessarily contribute to their children's academic success. "A considerable body of evidence suggests that changes in governance arrangements are only weakly related to teaching and learning and thus do not improve student achievement" (Lemmer, 2007, p. 218)

It seems like very few parents actively involve themselves in their children's education and this may also decrease after the inception years (Levin, 1997). According to Epstein (1995) most parents prefer involvement in their own

children's education and learning in particular, rather than through governing bodies.

Studies have also revealed that educators are reluctant to allow parents to assume decision-making roles and school governance because it feels as an intrusion on their domain and they are seen as over-stepping their boundaries (Grant-Lewis and Naidoo, 2004).

Hall and Engelbrecht (1999) reinforce that parents need to become involved in their children's education and this involvement must include insight into their children's progress, particularly in decision-making and being critical of information on educational issues.

## **2.2 Studies within an African context**

The South African situation is complex. The imbalance in parental involvement in education is clearly identified in historically disadvantaged schools. Research conducted in formally disadvantaged Black schools revealed that 70% of educator participants indicated that parents' ignorance resulted in the lack of academic success at the school. However, the parent participants indicated that the school did not involve them in school practices (Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, 2004).

McGrath and Kuriloff (1999) point out that policymakers and school administrators cannot be indifferent to the effects of socio-economic status as it has a great influence on parental involvement in education.

The unequal opportunities during Apartheid left many of the marginalised working away from home; the existence of child-headed households was a common occurrence; Language and communication problems were some of the factors that made parental involvement almost non-existent (Ibrahim and Jamil, 2012).

Divorces, single parents and parents' own educational experiences are more recent factors that can influence parental involvement (Jeynes, 2011). The effects

of the HIV pandemic on schooling are some of the many barriers that may influence parental involvement at schools. When parents die, many children are left under the guardianship of relatives. Therefore, these theories that make mention of parental involvement should be extended to include guardian involvement to become more representative of the status quo of South Africa.

The unauthorised, yet persistent use of corporal punishment at schools since 1996 was cited by Morrel (2006) as a crisis in education where parents can play a positive role. Stating that in the absence of alternatives to corporal punishment at school, parents can enforce punishment in the home as a caution against poor performance or bad behaviour. This reinforces the premise that parents may hold the key to greater academic achievement if an effective working partnership is maintained.

Jeynes (2011) looked at historical perspectives through to the recent emergence of theories and research on parental involvement. His findings support Epstein's (1995) theory when teachers realised that children can develop to their optimum potential if they were partnered with parents.

Furthermore, an interesting finding in this study was that African American parents participate more in the education of girls than boys. This is a direct contrast to the South African culture in which boys are viewed as breadwinners and carry the family name, thus more focus is on boy's education (Leach, 1998).

In another study undertaken at primary schools in the Katsina State of Nigeria, the nature of parental involvement in their children's schooling was explored. The findings were that parents, who do not provide a stimulating and stable home environment, lay the foundation for an unhealthy, chaotic learning environment in their children's education (Ibrahim and Jamil, 2012).

The study highlighted many reasons like single parenting, illiteracy, poverty and child-headed families, as to why parents do not get involved. It was interesting to note that an African country like Nigeria, with similar socio-economic conditions as South Africa, has experienced similar barriers to parental involvement (Ibrahim



and Jamil, 2012). Furthermore, the finding of this study supports Epstein's (1995) theory that parental involvement contributed towards the academic success of their children.

The positive influence of parental involvement is highlighted in all of the aforementioned research but as LaRocque, Kleiman and Darling (2011) argue that due to the barriers to parental involvement, it is difficult to promote the continuous and consistent participation of parents. Therefore, the data received from this study may assist in finding ways to encourage and sustain parental involvement.

The ideology of a partnership in education may reveal that even though it may be most beneficial to the learner, both the teacher and parent may also be positively influenced by this interaction. Whilst both teachers and parents may stay informed of what is expected of them, the teacher may also gain valuable information about the learner's background and what kind of assistance to provide.

Hughes (1999) supports the practice of a partnership and states that in the South African context there are two main forms of partnership. Firstly, partnering education on a day-to-day basis of helping children learn. Secondly, getting parents involved in school governing bodies.

### **2.3 Role of Parents in Early Education**

Parents are considered the first point of contact to children after birth and are seen as the primary educators. This reinforces the fact that learning begins at home. As a child develops he or she is constantly watching and emulating the behaviour of the parent.

Wagner and Clayton (1999) point out that parent-education programmes implemented overseas, include home visits designed to begin prenatally or at birth. Through these home visits, the parent educators help parents to strengthen their parenting skills and knowledge on how to develop their children, from a young age, into successful human beings. In South Africa, there is a definite need

for such a link to equip parents with these valuable skills. Parental involvement is crucial from birth and needs to be accelerated once the child attends school.

## **2.4 Parents as Partners in the Education Process**

In the South African education system, traditionally, little recognition was given to parental involvement and parents had been excluded from participating actively in the education of their children (Van Wyk, 2004). Wherever parental involvement existed, it was mainly concerned with issues such as fund-raising.

The recent developments in South Africa gave parents and community members an increased role in governing schools, hence the introduction of School Governing Bodies in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. The act stipulates that the number of parents on the governing body needs to exceed the combined total of the other members of the governing body. This in itself reinforces the very significant role that parents are expected to play in education (Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2006).

The Department of Basic Education is embarking on innovative ways to get parents more involved in the education process. The White Paper 6 encourages the wider community to assist and support learners that are experiencing barriers to learning (Department of Education, 2001, p22). These developments clearly reinforce collaboration between home, community and school (Raborife and Phasha, 2010).

The school and parents are expected to establish new ways of partnering with each other as both possess valuable information that can be shared in order to contribute to the child's educational progress. Therefore, Raborife and Phasha (2010) concur with Epstein (1995) that family-school collaboration is an important part of any learner's academic success.

Even though these afore-mentioned departmental initiatives offer guidelines for official parental involvement, home-school partnership should not be limited only to

activities outlined in the Act. Dietz (1997) explains that wherever schools restrict parental involvement to a certain type of involvement, such as governance or fund raising, only a fraction of the parent community participates. Furthermore, this type of participation may not necessarily improve the academic performance of learners.

Epstein's (1987) model of parental involvement maintains that home and school communication should be a two-way communication and that a co-equal partnership between families and schools should exist (Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2004).

Furthermore, Epstein (1987) argues that educators, who form partnerships with parents, understand their learners better, resulting in unusual rather than routine answers to classroom issues. In addition, parents may develop a greater appreciation of their role. Bronfenbrenner (1986) also reinforces this two-way communication when he makes mention of bi-directional influences of involvement where the parent, teacher and learner are each influenced by the other.

Parental involvement in education has been associated with higher grade-point averages (Gutman and Midgley, 2000), lower dropout rates (Rumberger, 1995) and increased achievement in reading (Senechal and LeFevre, 2002) amongst other positive outcomes.

## **2.5 Different Forms of Parental Involvement**

Fishel and Ramirez (2005) maintain that as parental involvement research progressed, it had become evident to most researchers that parental involvement is a multi-dimensional rather than homogeneous construct. Schools and parents often don't share the same ideas on what is needed or wanted. Therefore, the starting point in establishing a strong parent-teacher partnership is to provide clarity on different forms of involvement that parents may engage themselves in.

It was interesting to note that in a much earlier study by Pugh (1987), dimensions to the different forms of parental involvement were identified as participation, non-participation, external support, control and partnership. Non-participation suggests no involvement. External support refers to activities that include fund raising and attending social events at school. Participation refers to involvement in committees or the maintenance of the school's resources.

Partnership involves working together to share power, resources, knowledge and decision-making between the home and the school. Control refers to decision-making, accountability and responsibility by parents who should make and implement them and assume full responsibility for its consequences (Pugh, 1987).

According to Christenson and Sheridan (2001), it appears that most definitions of parental involvement fall under four major categories, namely, parental academic aspirations and expectations for children, participation in school activities and programs, home structure that supports learning and communication with children about school.

Although parental involvement was seen as part of a solution for school education in society as a whole, there are some problems and inconsistencies related to research on parental involvement (Fan and Chen, 2001). Certain research findings have reinforced the positive influence of parental involvement on academic achievement (Epstein, 1995) whilst others have found minimal measurable influence (Fan and Chen, 2001).

The inconsistencies that emerged in the absence of a sound theoretical framework appear to be something of the past. Many promising theories for parental involvement have come to the fore (Epstein 2001, Fan and Chen, 2001) suggesting different levels of parental involvement that have now become widely recognised. In the 1980s, Epstein identified four types of parental involvement related to schools.

Firstly, mention was made of basic obligations. School to home communication was the second. Parent involvement at schools was cited as the third and finally parent involvement in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1987).

More recently, she expanded on this typology and outlined six levels of parental involvement, namely, parenting (providing for basic needs and sound discipline), communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and lastly, collaboration with community (Epstein, 1995). The lack of community becoming involved in teacher development programmes and the restricted nature of the school curricula were cited by Casanova (1996) as two reasons why all of Epstein's levels of parental involvement may not be achieved in countries other than the United States of America.

Reay (1998) researched parental involvement from a different perspective, namely, amongst working-class and middle-class mothers and how they perceive their role and that of their children in education. The need for parental involvement, together with the motivating and self-posting of parents, were reinforced. It is evident that in an earlier study conducted on working class mothers, schools also maintained that the "whole discourse of parental involvement assumes that teachers must teach parents" (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989, p181). With the emphasis on changing the parent, working class mothers are seen as pupils to be educated. It is, therefore, evident that parental involvement is not seen as a simple one way process where parents are changed and the school decides how, when things should be done?

Other researchers like Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski and Apostoleris (1997), questioned the practicality of home-school partnerships, looking at parental involvement from a similar perspective. They maintained that its effectiveness depended on the socio-economic status of the parent or learner. Parents from a low socio-economic environment may not fully understand the effects of parental involvement on scholastic achievement because of their own educational experience. As a result, these authors argue their involvement may be non-existent or minimal.

Hoover, Dempsey and Sandler (1997) believe that the involvement of parents will not close the gap in achievement of learners from lower socio-economic groups. This is a reality especially in South Africa as the major part of the parent population come from a low-income background (Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, 2004). These parents primary objective is to put food on the table. They work extended hours for a meagre wage just to feed their families. Even if they wanted to, they do not have the time or energy to concern them with their children's education. The study by Singh *et al.*, (2004) found that the black parents' role in education is crucial in the enhancement of the learners' academic success as they make up the majority of the South African population.

The reality then is that socio-economic status and parents' own educational abilities are some of the many barriers that need to be studied when trying to understand why some parents are reluctant to get involved in their children's education.

It was also well documented that parents' own experiences (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey, 2005), time constraints and work commitments (Weiss *et al.*, 2003), parents' limited skills and knowledge (Drummond and Stipek 2004) hinder involvement in their childrens' education. It is also well documented by Banks and Banks (2009) that parents from socially and culturally diverse backgrounds are not sufficiently involved. Therefore, it is important to get a clear understanding of the different barriers as too often these social, economic, linguistic and cultural practices of parents are seen as serious problems rather than valuable information.

## **2.6 Benefits of Parental Involvement to the Learner**

Joyce Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence illustrates that learners succeed at high levels when both parents and educators work together to promote success in the school. Different learners are presented with the same potential of learning when there is a partnership forged between teacher and

parent. Hence, parental involvement in education is of vital importance. Parental encouragement serves as a motivating factor to the child as it indicates the belief that parents may have in their children.

Epstein's (1995) Framework of Six Types of Involvement outlines positive results for the learner at each level of involvement. They are as follows:

- a) 'Parenting' yields the following results: respect for parents, improved attendance, positive personal qualities taught by the family, balance between time spent on homework and chores and an awareness of the importance of school.
- b) 'Communicating' yields the following results: awareness of own results and what needs to be done to improve grades, a better understanding of school policies, courses and grades and awareness of his or her role as communicator within the partnership.
- c) 'Volunteering' yields the following results: skill in communicating with adults, increase in learning skills being tutored by volunteers and awareness of skills, talents and contributions by parents and other volunteers.
- d) 'Learning at home' yields results relating to importance of homework and its completion, positive attitude towards schoolwork, awareness of similarities between home and school and parent and teacher and it also boosts the learner's self-concept.
- e) 'Decision-making' creates awareness of the need for family's involvement in school decision-making, an understanding that learner rights are protected and the benefits to learners linked to policies enacted by parent organisations.
- f) 'Collaborating with Community' increases skills through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences, awareness of career and further education options and work opportunities. It is the benefits from these programs, services, resources and opportunities that link learners with the community.

It is apparent in many studies (Henderson and Berla, 1994; Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2004; Singh *et. al.*, 2004; Raborife and Phasha, 2010) that parental involvement is crucial and should include love, mutual trust and co-operation between the school, home and community.

Another study that reinforced the importance of parental involvement was conducted by Adams and Christenson (2000). They tested the influence of general parental involvement on learners and found that parental involvement had a significant effect on scholastic achievement. Another interesting find was that the extent of parental involvement tends to decline, for several reasons, in the learners' middle and high school years.

Another study focused on elementary grades and found positive links between learner-variables and parental involvement. A sense of well-being, attendance, grades, homework readiness, student attitudes, educational aspirations and academic achievement were reported (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991).

Epstein (1995) also raised some concerns about the presumed positive effect that parental involvement can have on achievement. Her findings were that gains were higher in some achievement tests, except for Mathematics. She found that higher achievement was attained only in the subjects that parents were confident in their ability to support their children's learning. This may be due to the fact that parents are not confident in their ability to support their children's' learning at high school level. Drummond and Stipek, (2004), found that parents' involvement in homework declines as children's subject matter moves closer or supersedes the parents' knowledge.

## **2.7 Benefits of Parental Involvement to the Teacher**

When teachers and parents subscribe to shared responsibilities, the increased interaction creates school-like families and family-like schools (Comer, 1992).



Teachers can obtain invaluable information from parents who know their children better than anyone else. Early history of birth and developmental milestones are some of the important information imparted by parents that can assist teachers in gaining a much better understanding of learner's progress.

This is supported by Epstein's (1995) Framework, in which each of the six types of parental involvement suggests varied benefits to the teacher. They are as follows:

- a) 'Parenting' suggests that a teacher will benefit from a better understanding of families' background, goals and impression of their children. Respect for families, understanding of learner diversity and an awareness of a teacher's own skill to share information on child development, will be established.
- b) 'Communicating' gives the teacher a better understanding of diversity and one's own ability to communicate clearly. It also equips teachers to appreciate and make use of parental network for communications. Teachers can use communication to elicit and understand family views on children's programmes and progress.
- c) 'Volunteering' equips teachers with a readiness to involve families in new ways and to encourage those who do not volunteer. Teachers become aware of parents' talents and interest in school and their children. The help from volunteers assists in teachers giving learners greater individual attention.
- d) 'Learning at Home' helps the teacher to design better homework assignments. It creates a sense of respect for family time and a realisation that single-parent, dual-income and less formally educated families can provide equal motivation and reinforcement for learners and learning. In their interaction, teachers can gain a sense of satisfaction with family involvement and support.
- e) 'Decision-making' enables teachers to look at policy development and decisions from a parent's perspective and teaches them to view parent representation on committees and in leadership roles as having equal status.

- f) 'Collaborating with Community' creates awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction; the ability to use community members as mentors, business partners, volunteers and learner assistants and in so doing, boost teaching and learning and the acquisition of knowledge to make referrals to needed services.

From all of these benefits outlined by Epstein, (1987), it is evident that parental involvement is not only crucial to the learner but to the teacher as well. However, most teachers and schools have not been trained on how to elicit this involvement from parents; therefore, this study aimed to offer suggestions for greater parental involvement.

Parents can become involved as audience, as volunteers, as a teacher of his or her own child, as a learner, as a decision-maker and as a para-professional (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). However, the teacher is not adequately trained to engage with parents effectively on these levels therefore, Lawson, (2003), sees this as a barrier to effective parental involvement.

## **2.8 Barriers to Parental Involvement**

There are many barriers to parental involvement.

"The benefits of effective collaboration and how to do them are well documented across all grades of schooling. Still they are not in widespread practice" as summarised very appropriately by Henderson and Berla (1994, p. 18). Almost two decades later, nothing much has changed. There exists a definite gap in what is said and what is done. It is this gap that gives rise to barriers to parental involvement.

The reality in South Africa is that even though benefits of parental involvement are well documented, educators still lack knowledge on how to reach parents. Apart from legislation committing parental involvement in school governance structures,

no other formal, structured programme has been designed or implemented by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa. There is a need to guide and assist schools, parents and community to become more involved in education and to find ways of minimising the many limitations.

Researchers need to focus their studies on how to deal with illiteracy, poverty, extended working hours, working away from home, children being left in the care of guardians and older siblings (Lawson, 2003) that are so prevalent in the South African context.

A year-long case study undertaken by Delores (2000), in respect of the involvement of Mexican-American parents in their elementary school children's education revealed that many factors had influenced parental involvement. These included amongst others, parents' education level and attitude of school staff, language and family issues.

An understanding of these factors from a parent's perspective will enable educators and other stake-holders to plan and strategize on how to increase and improve parental involvement. Instead of assuming that absence means non-caring, teachers need to understand that most parents do not have an educational background and some have very little or no experience in working with schools.

There may also be emotional barriers and other issues that hinder effective parental involvement (Finders and Lewis, 2002). These may include parents who did not cope well at school themselves and may find it uncomfortable to work in a partnership with teachers as they had difficulty in communicating their own needs to their own teacher. There may also be a feeling of guilt when their child may have a special need that they are in some way responsible for their child's difficulties. Grief is another emotion that they may be battling with as they try to come to terms with their child's special educational needs (Finders and Lewis, 2002).

Furthermore, complex family situations can develop many challenges, making participating in their child's education a sometimes impossible task. These could

include amongst others, shift work, or families dealing with more than one child with special needs and being a single-parent can be very demanding and challenging on the parent.

A study undertaken by Astone and McLanaham (1994) found that children who grow up with both parents are more successful than children who live with only one parent during childhood. This, they argue is as a result of high residential mobility and unsettled schooling as the children from single-parent families and step-families are likely to move house more often than two-parent families. They add that a parent from a rural area may not see the need to engage in a partnership because he or she may not feel confident or equipped to offer the kind of support needed.

A study by Bermudez and Marquez (1996) found that culturally and linguistically different families remain detached from the education system. They argue that the lack of English language skills further impacts on the parents' lack of understanding of the school system and the home-school participation. The lack of confidence, work interference, negative past experiences with schools and unwelcoming school personnel also keep families alienated from the school system.

It takes a while to develop a sense of trust where parents are relaxed and comfortable to talk about their children. Lack of trust usually arises from a lack of clarity in respect of the school or teacher's intentions. Thus, the parents' non-involvement is not always a lack of concern according to Bermudez and Marquez (1996) but sometimes a disappointment at not being kept informed of rights, roles and responsibilities of their children. Some parents have difficulty in accepting and believing that their child may be different from others, for example, those with special needs who may appear more or less normal outside of the school environment.

South Africa is a multilingual nation with eleven official languages. Many parents with language barriers may have difficulty communicating with school (Petersen and Warnsby, 1992). This may result in their reluctance to get involved in their

children's education due to a lack of confidence, self-worth and detachment from a system that they are not able to comprehend. Furthermore, parents may also harbour negative feelings about home-school partnerships when schools only initiate communication to complain about their children. This can result in the parents disengaging themselves from the schools.

With South Africa also being a multicultural nation, it is common knowledge that people in a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artefacts and behaviour in the same or similar way (Banks and Banks, 2009). The concept of cultural capital has been known widely as the work of Bourdieu used in his own educational research explaining that activities practised by the dominant social class provide an individual with the skills and socialization to succeed in an educational environment (De Graff, De Graff and Kraaykamp, 2000).

Cultural Capital for parents in respect of their children's education indicates their power to promote and enhance scholastic achievement (Lee and Bowen, 2006).

They maintain that parents who possess less cultural capital, like people who have low levels of education are likely to be less involved in the education of the children. These parents possibly lack confidence in engaging and communicating with teachers. They may also lack the knowledge of the school system or the more recent developments in terms of parental participation in schools.

Lareau and Weininger (2003) explain clearly that cultural capital in terms of education, relates to parental involvement in the following ways:

- Parents understanding of school processes.
- Parents communication skills.
- Amount of contact parents have with school personnel
- Amount of contact parents have with other parents.

The concept of cultural capital gives us significant insight into understanding the role schools can play in encouraging parental involvement. Tett (2001) argues that school teachers hail from different cultures and have different ideas about education and learning. They should not see parents as problems but rather as

people that can make an important contribution to education. Parents are in possession of a wealth of information that can assist the teacher gain a better understanding of a learner and suggests that a parent-centred approach should be taken towards promoting teaching and learning.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed different studies related to parental involvement and offered clarification of the different terminology used in the study. The role of parents as partners in the education process was discussed in detail. The researcher provided an overview of the different types of parental involvement and how these can be beneficial to both the learners and the teachers. Finally, the barriers to parental involvement were looked at so as to glean a better understanding of what challenges contribute negatively to effective parental involvement.

The next chapter presents a theoretical framework which forms the basis of this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter examined the available literature used by the researcher to give insight into the role of parents as partners in the education process. This chapter provides the theoretical framework which underpins this study. The researcher has adopted an integrated theoretical framework: the “Eco-systems Theory” and “The Theory of overlapping spheres of influence” as the basis for this study.

The Eco-system’s (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) theory reinforces the role of family influence in bringing about change. Development, according to this theory is located within five major systems, listed below,

- The microsystem comprises of family, peers, school, caregivers and others that may have direct interaction with the child on a regular basis.
- The mesosystem comprises of the link or connections that occur within the microsystem.
- The exosystem does not involve the child directly but may influence or be influenced by those who share close relationships with the child in the microsystem.
- “The macrosystem involves dominant social structures, as well as beliefs and values that influence and may be influenced by all other levels of system” (Narain, 2005, p 18)

- The chronosystem encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to the child's environment.

The microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem and exosystem all interact with the chronosystem. This theory postulates that each system cannot function in isolation and it is this interaction, interdependence and overlapping that strengthens the child's development both academically and emotionally. Parents and the school are two important components of the microsystem and parental educational involvement in the home shapes the attitudes and behaviours governing these two microsystems (Lee and Bowen, 2006). Thus, those individuals that make up the microsystem and the connections that they make in the mesosystem have a great impact on key aspects of a child's life, in this case, the child's education. The partnership or interaction between home and school is of vital importance as it influences the academic progress of a child to a large extent.

This 'interaction' or 'overlapping' is further reinforced in Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres, indicating the different levels of parental involvement and how this overlap is crucial to the child's scholastic performance. Epstein maintains that there are six levels of parental involvement.

- Parenting
- Communicating
- Volunteering
- Learning at home
- Decision making
- Collaborating with the community

This theory maintains that parental involvement in any one level is not enough and it is crucial for parents to become involved in all six types of involvement in order to have a positive impact on their child's scholastic performance.

Both these theories therefore assist in the understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement as they complement each other. The one offers an explanation of the overlap of the different systems involved in the educational



development of the child. An important component of the microsystem is the parent and family and the connections that they make in the mesosystem have a significant impact on education. The other theory offers the overlap of the different actions by the school that may enhance parental involvement.

### **3.2 The Eco-Systems Theory**

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory focuses on the social context within which a child lives and the manner in which people impact on the child's development. This theory suggests that parents have a significant influence on the education of their children (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). However in some cases schools themselves are unclear about the role that parents should play in education (Vandergrift and Greene, 1992).

The eco-system's theory, as the name suggests, is a combination of ecological and systems views (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2002). Its main argument "is that individual people and groups at various levels of the social context are linked in dynamic, interdependent and interacting relationships" (Kalenga, 2010, p. 88). This implies that no individual can exist in isolation and that he or she needs the constant support of his or her environment. The child needs the constant support and guidance of teachers as well as parents to develop holistically. Research has revealed that parents' involvement in education has a positive effect on children's scholastic achievement (Narain, 2005 and Wanda, 2007).

This theory maintains that family influence is very important in bringing about change (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) thus providing a way to conceptualize integration and interaction between children and their parents and to examine how this influences academic achievement.

Development is located within four main systems, namely, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Each of these systems relate to the chronosystem. The Eco-systems theory approaches a child's development within the systems of relationships that form part of his or her environment.

This theory identifies different layers of the environment, each having a significant effect on a child's development. Any change in one layer will have a cascading effect on the other layers. Bronfenbrenner also makes mention of bi-directional influences which involves a two-way effect, meaning that a parent may affect the belief and behaviour of the child and similarly, the child may affect the behaviour and belief of the parent.

The microsystem, according to Donald *et al.* (2002), is the layer nearest to the child and contains structures with which the child interacts directly, for example, family members, school and caregivers.

The mesosystem provides the link or connection between the structures of the child's microsystem. It consists of a set of microsystems that continuously interact with one another for example, with immediate family, extended family or classroom. For the purpose of this study it is important to note that what happens at home can influence what happens at school and vice-versa.

The exosystem involves the larger community in which the child does not involve himself or herself directly but impacts on the child's development by interacting with some structures in the microsystem, an example of which is the parent's workplace. If a parent loses his or her job or works long hours, this will influence the way he or she reacts with the child.

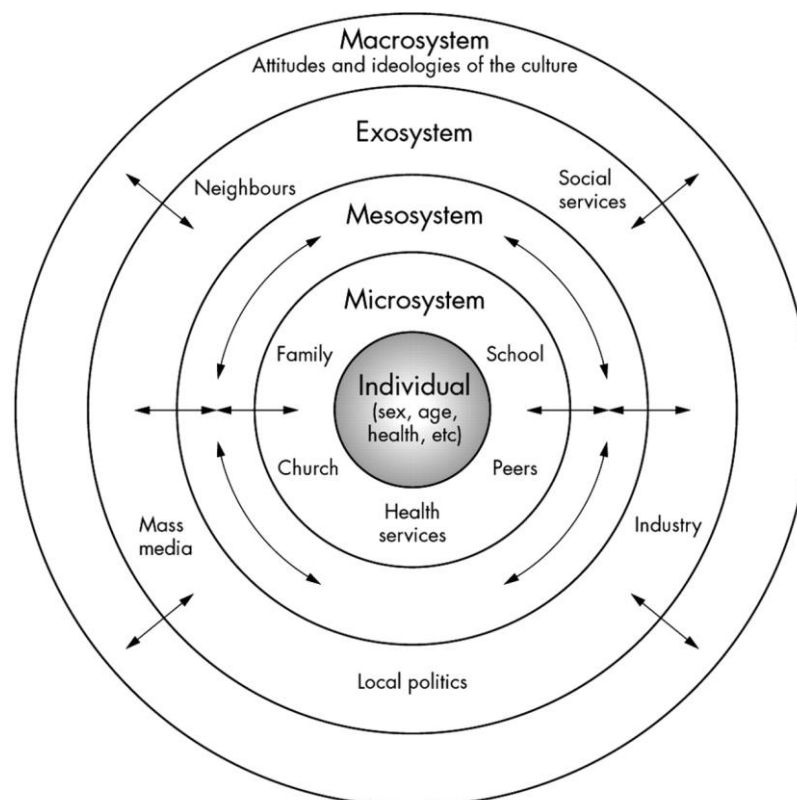
The macrosystem is the outermost layer in the child's environment and includes the child's customs, cultural values and law. For example, if it is the culture that a parent is solely responsible for raising his or her own children, there will be little or no interaction with the school; as a result the child's scholastic development will be affected.

The chronosystem encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to the child's environment. This involves what stage of a child's life he or she is in. As children get older, they might interact differently to various changes. For example, a younger child may react differently to a parent's death than an older child.

According to the Eco-systems theory, if the relationship in the immediate microsystem breaks down, the child may not be equipped to explore or venture out into other parts of the environment. This theory supports the premise that this study is based on the crucial role of parents. It is therefore necessary for schools and teachers to develop sound relationships.

“Parental involvement at school promotes connections between adults in two of the child’s primary microsystems, the home and the school, and parental educational involvement at home conveys congruence in the attitudes and behaviours governing these two microsystems” (Lee and Bowen, 2006, p.196). These interdependent and interacting relationships between the home system and the school system are vital in influencing the educational outcomes of a child.

Figure 1 **BRONFENBRENNER’S ECOLOGICAL THEORY**



(Source: <http://jech.bmj.com/content/59/1/6/F2.large.jpg>)

Accessed on 05: 05: 2013.

The Ecological theory provides an understanding of the interaction within the systems. Thus, the ecological view is that peers, school and community need to be studied in order to have a more informed understanding of academic achievement of learners. Therefore, from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) explanation of the Ecological theory, it is clear that no child can develop in isolation. It is the contribution of parents, school and community that develops a child holistically. This is reinforced by the African tribal maxim that maintains that it takes a village to raise a child (Robert, 2008).

Donald *et al.* (2002) further highlights the role of the different levels of a system in the process of development. The different levels of systems were used to investigate the relationship between parental involvement and scholastic performance which was the focus of this study. Development is located within four systems, namely, microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem and exosystem which interact with the chronosystem.

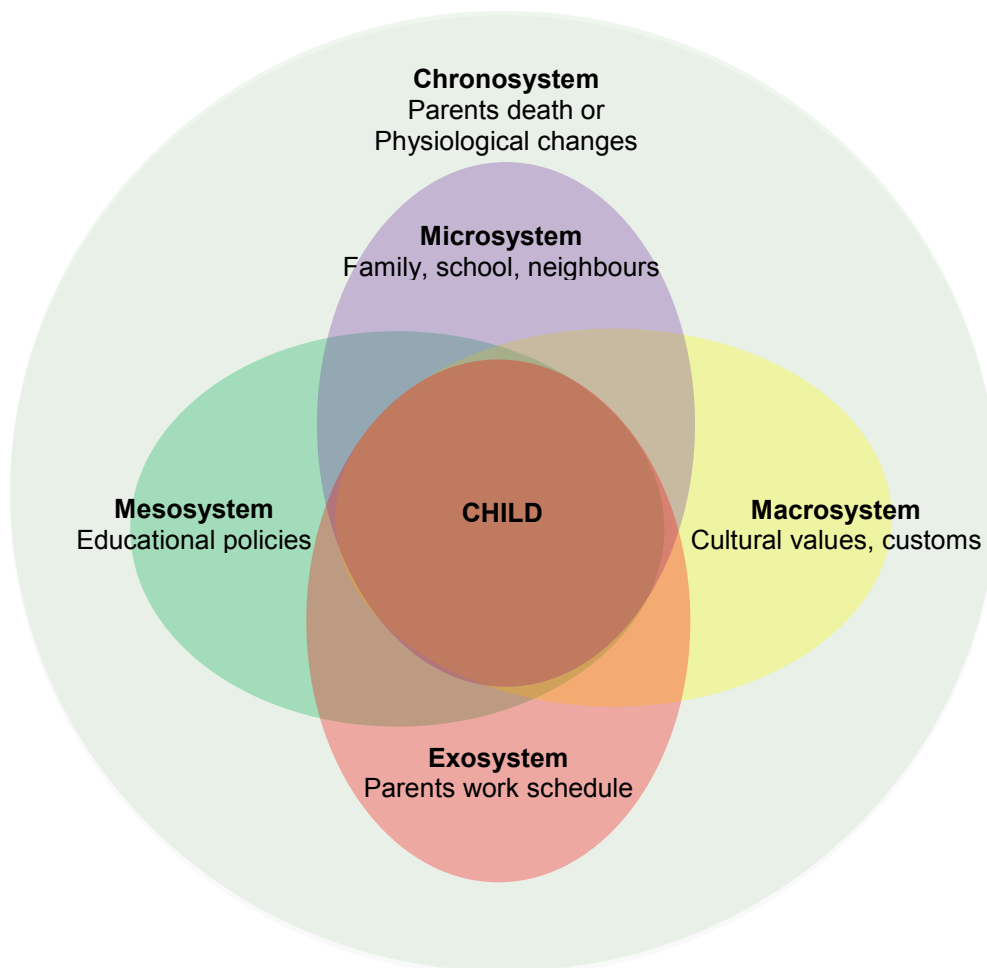
For the purpose of this study, the microsystem refers to the family, school and neighbour. An example of the mesosystem is educational policies. The macrosystem refers to the cultural values, customs and law. The exosystem involves the larger social system in which the child may not function directly but which impacts on his or her development by overlapping or interacting with some structures in the microsystem. For example, the parent's work schedule.

There needs to be interaction and communication amongst all of these systems in order for the chronosystem which encompasses the dimension of time, to relate to the child's environment. For example, a parent's death or other physiological changes as the child gets older.

Another example to explain the way time relates to the child's environment is if a child has been exposed to the South African culture from birth and the family emigrates to America when he is a teenager, the child will most definitely be influenced by the American culture that he or she is now exposed to by the parent. The chronosystem, therefore, relates to where or at what stage the child is in at a particular time.

Using the four different levels of systems, namely, microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem and exosystem, and their interaction, communication and expectation, ultimately relates to the holistic development of the child. The researcher depicts this interdependence and development in Figure 2.

Figure 2 **THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD**



The Ecological perspective indicates that in order to gain a better understanding of the child, he or she needs to be seen against a backdrop of his family, the community and society (Narain, 2005). This view assists in examining the importance of parental involvement in a child's emotional well-being and scholastic performance.

It is the responsibility of the parent to provide love, warmth, nutrition, supervision and encouragement as pre-requisites to a positive home environment and when viewed through the ecological perspective this in turn may have a positive influence on the child's academic performance in school.

If parents can believe in their children and go the extra mile to encourage and motivate them to achieve academically, half of the battle is already won. Schools can be seen as an open systems that rely on information from other schools, families, teachers, department of education and others. It is however, the input from the parent that can equip the teacher to cope with each child's individual needs.

The parent is seen as the primary teacher from birth and has observed all of the trials and tribulations in terms of development and attaining milestones. It is imperative that these observations are shared with the teacher as all of this information will give the teacher a clearer understanding of where the child is presently at. The input made by each of the other systems depicted in Fig. 2 serves to add to the holistic development of the child.

This ideology of 'overlapping' is further reinforced in Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres (1987) to indicate the different levels of parental involvement.

### **3.3 The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Involvement**

Dr Joyce Epstein, Professor of Sociology at the University of John Hopkins and also the director of the Centre on School, Family and Community Partnership, is at the forefront of research relating to parental involvement in education.

It may be beneficial to first understand a previous theory by Epstein that influenced the emergence of the overlapping spheres of involvement. This theoretical model postulates school and family involvement by highlighting separate, shared and sequential responsibilities of schools, families and communities. It was also the Eco-systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1986) that influenced Epstein's (1987)

theory of overlapping spheres. The spheres that Epstein makes reference to are the family, school and community with the child being the focus of attention.

The theoretical view on home-school interaction has a great influence on promoting or limiting parental involvement in the schools. Epstein first developed a theoretical model to explain parental involvement based on the underlying views about relations within the school and family (Epstein, 1995). She identified three types of responsibilities.

- Separate responsibilities of families and schools.
- Shared responsibilities of families and schools.
- Sequential responsibilities of families and schools.

The separate roles of parent and teacher are considered to be best achieved when each keeps their distance and independence (Epstein, 1987). In practice, the researcher has learnt from many years of experience as a teacher that separate responsibilities as an ideology does not work in the best interest of the child as there is no sharing, declaring or continuing what was done or started in terms of the child's development before formal schooling.

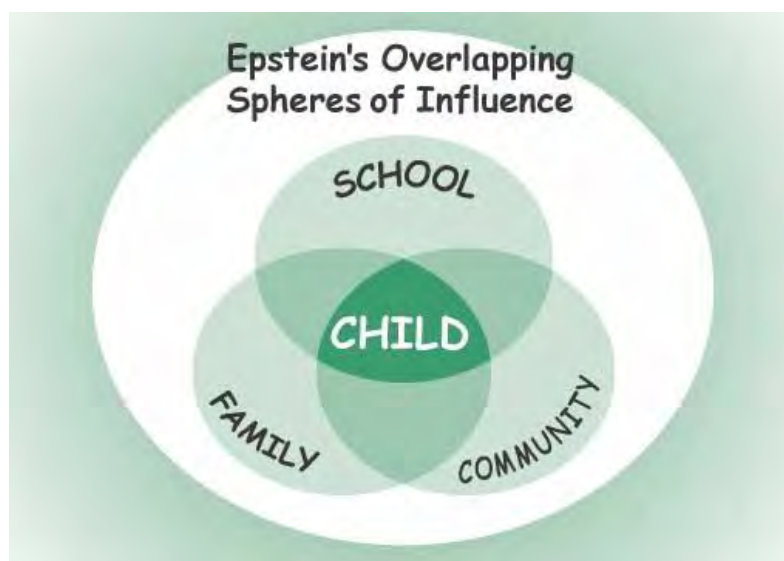
The shared responsibility of school and home, on the other hand, reinforces collaboration, coordination and cooperation between the two (Epstein, 1987). Schools and families share responsibilities for the socialisation and development of the child. Thus, an overlap of responsibility between parent and teacher is anticipated. This ideology of shared responsibility forms the basis of this study. It is also further reinforced by both theories, namely, Eco-systems theory and Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres that undergirds this study.

Finally the sequential perspective of responsibilities stresses the important role of parent and teachers at different stages of the child's development. Thereafter, teachers assume the main responsibility for children's education. In reality, the transformation in South African education in terms of SASA (DoE, 1996), the National Curriculum Statement and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement

require parents to play a significant role in their children's' education throughout their schooling career. Parental involvement as predicted by Donald *et al.* (2006) cannot be reinforced further than by both parents and teachers in school to facilitate transformation.

Figure 3. represents Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres and how school, family and the community share responsibilities for the socialisation and development of the child. Thus, figure 3. depicts the influence of the shared responsibility on the child. These overlapping spheres of influence, according to Epstein (1987), only serve to strengthen the development of the child.

Figure 3     **EPSTEIN'S OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE**



(Source: Epstein and Sheldon, 2002)

This theory of overlapping spheres indicates that learners succeed to great levels when the internal and external factors of influence interact and intersect to work together to promote scholastic success. This interaction can happen at an institutional level for example, when the school invites a family to parents' day or at an individual level, for example, parent and teacher interview.



The implication is, therefore, that parental involvement in children's schooling is crucial as it most often leads to the perfecting of tasks done in collaboration with the teacher, learner and parent (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002).

The concept of parental involvement in this study implies that chances are given to parents to support the school and teachers, making them more effective in reaching academic goals (Barton and Drake, 2002). It is important to bear in mind that each type of involvement poses specific challenges for its successful designs and implementation and each type leads to different outcomes for learners, parents and teachers (Epstein, Simon and Salinas, 1997).

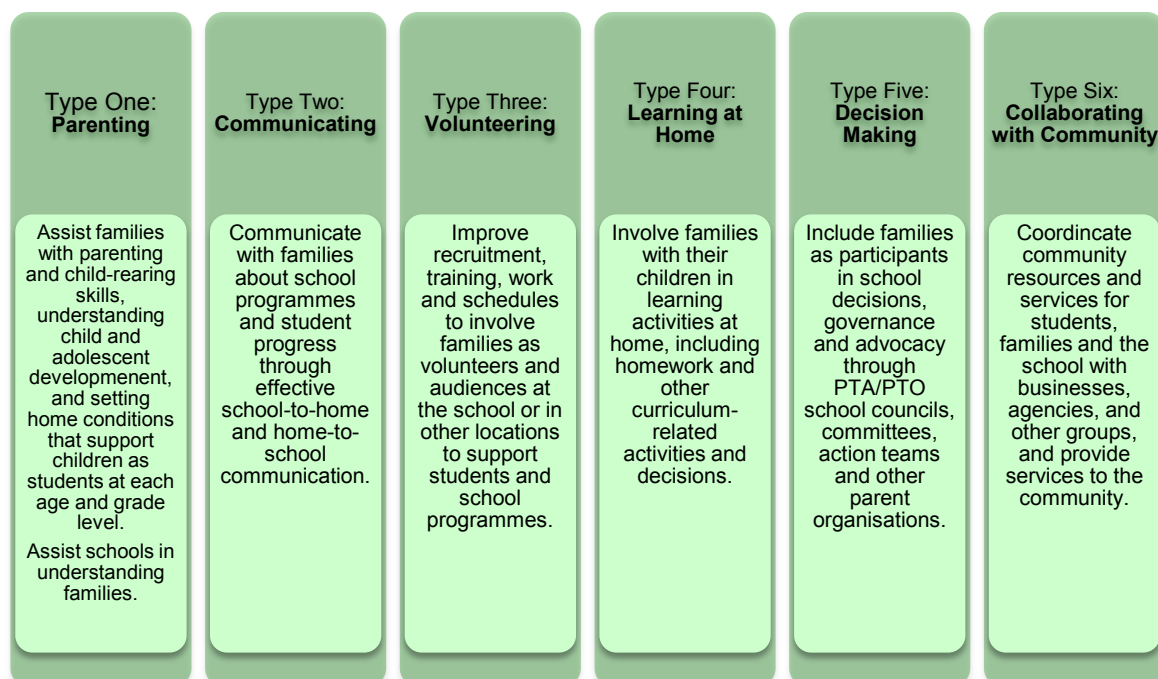
SASA (DoE, 1996), stipulated that by January 1997 each public school should have a governing body, comprising of, amongst others, parents or guardians of present learners at school and members of the community, elected by the governing body. However, initiatives by the Department of Education to promote parental participation in various other forms are almost non-existent (Lemmer and van Wyk, 2006). The encouragement and management of parental support both at home and in school still remains the responsibility of each school.

The review of a study by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) suggests that even in well-designed school programs inviting involvement will meet with only limited success if they do not address issues of parental role construction and parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school. Parents are generally vague about the role that they should play in the education of their children.

Epstein's framework of six major types of involvement offers more clarity on different ways in which parents can get involved (Epstein *et al.*, 1997). This typology falls within the area of overlapping spheres and was formulated after many studies and with the assistance of educators in schools. The emphasis is on the school initiating activities to ensure greater parent and community involvement again reinforcing the African tribal maxim that maintains that it takes a village to raise a child (Robert, 2008).

The six types of parent involvement can be seen in figure 4.

Figure 4 **SIX TYPES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**



(Source: Epstein, 1995))

Type 1 - Parenting: Schools should be offering assistance and advice to communities and families with regard to parenting and child-rearing skills like positive reinforcement, balanced diets, nutrition and discipline amongst others. Support from family, understanding child and adolescent development and setting home conditions like sharing of chores, homework timetable, reading programmes and so on to support learning at the different stages and grade levels.

Type 2 - Communication: Regular communication with families about school programmes like changes in curriculum and students' academic progress as well as behavioural issues are of utmost importance. At the researcher's school, each learner has a message book for school-to-home communication and vice-versa. However, very often, when parents need to be contacted as a matter of urgency, their contact numbers are incorrect or not in use. Parents need to be reminded that this could be detrimental in an emergency and that they should be responsible by informing the school as soon as there is a change in their contact details.

Type 3 – Volunteering: A data base of parents and community members, who wish to volunteer their services for relief-teaching, fund-raising and maintenance of the school, could be compiled. Schools should find ways and means of improving their strategies for training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers and recruiters, audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programmes.

Type 4 – Learning at home: Parents and communities to be reassured that they can help learning at home even if there are some barriers like language competency. Parents can in this case just ensure that some time in the day is set aside for homework. Schools should try to get families more involved with their children in learning activities at home, including other curricular-linked activities, decisions and homework. When children know they are being monitored and supervised on a regular basis, they will be more focused and accountable.

Type 5 – Decision making: SASA (DoE, 1996) has made this mandatory and schools should try to include parents as participants in school governance, decision making and advocacy activities through school governing bodies, committees, councils and other parent organisations.

Type 6 – Collaborating with the community: Schools should partner with the community by co-ordinating the work and resources of the businesses, colleges, universities or communities and other groups like religious organisations, to strengthen family practices, school programmes, student learning and development.

According to this theory, the responsibility lies with the school and its educators to encourage and motivate parents to get more involved. Once parents have more clarity on what is actually expected of them in terms of their involvement in their child's education, they may make the necessary effort to get more involved.

Instead of assuming that absence translates into non-caring or apathy amongst parents, this study focuses on the role of parents as partners in the education

process. Ensuring parental involvement requires trust, time and belief that parents are equal partners in the planning process.

Teachers can encourage parents, particularly in the early stages of schooling, to ensure that parents have positive and meaningful opportunities to become actively engaged and committed to the process. If teachers made more explicit the many ways they value the language, culture and knowledge of parents in their communities, parents may more readily accept an invitation to participate (Finders & Lewis, 2002).

This theory rejects the fact that parental involvement in any one type is sufficient or adequate but rather that all six types of involvement are crucial in enhancing a child's academic progress. SASA 84 (DoE,1996) has made it compulsory for parents to become involved in decision making and school governance. This is outlined as Type 5 involvement in Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres.

Dietz (1997) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) maintain that when schools limit parental involvement to governance or fund raising, only a fraction of the parent community participates. Furthermore, from the researcher's wealth of experience, it is evident that parental involvement on this level of governance will not necessarily improve learner achievement. Thus, the need for overlapping spheres of all types of involvement in order to boost teaching and learning.

The sanctioning of this home-school interaction was also done in the Education White Paper 6 - Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001). Each type of involvement will appear different in each case because individual schools adapt and change their practices to meet the individual or special needs of a learner and his or her family.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the theories that underpinned this study. The researcher used both the Eco-systemic theory and the theory of Overlapping Spheres to highlight the need for an interdependent and interactive relationship between

home and school. Furthermore, the researcher has shown how parents bring to the educational experience valuable knowledge and perspectives about their children's development.

The next chapter will discuss the research methodology used in this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical framework that underpinned this study. This chapter discusses the research methodology used in the researcher's inquiry into the involvement of parents in their children's education. The researcher made use of qualitative data production strategies to compile a rich case study by obtaining first-hand data from the participants.

The research site was a primary school in Isipingo, Durban. Data was produced by means of interviews with nine participants, namely, three natural or biological parents, three teachers who themselves are parents and three guardians. Questionnaires consisting of thirteen questions were administered to all nine participants. Transcripts were compiled and analysed using the thematic approach.

#### **4.2 Objectives of the Study**

- a) To explore parents' understandings of parental involvement.
- b) To identify challenges impacting on parental involvement.
- c) To identify strategies that can be used to promote parental involvement.

To realise these objectives, the study attempted to answer the following critical questions:

1. What are parents' understandings of parental involvement?
2. What are the challenges impacting on parental involvement?
3. What strategies can be used to promote parental involvement?

### **4.3 The Nature of Qualitative Research**

This research study adopted a qualitative research approach to answer the aforementioned research questions and to obtain a more in-depth understanding of parental involvement in children's education (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

This chosen approach was viewed as the most appropriate to collect descriptive data that expressed the rich experiences and views of all participants rather than being statistical in nature. Narain (2005) concurs that qualitative research is an approach that emphasizes words as opposed to numbers in the gathering of data. Furthermore, this study aimed to explore relationships in terms of educational involvement between parent and child.

### **4.4 Research Paradigm**

This study is situated within the interpretive paradigm. It aimed to explore and understand how parents and teachers relate and interact with their children's education (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). An interpretivist perspective of a case study is that it directs the researcher towards a more in-depth study of how participants interact and relate with each other in a specific situation and how they bring meaning to a particular phenomenon being studied (Maree, 2007). From a qualitative interpretive perspective of inquiry, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers and administered questionnaires to pursue the primary research questions.

### **4.5 The Research Design**

"A research design indicates how the research is set up, what happens to the subjects and what methods of data collection are used" (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993, p.31)

Thus, it is important to choose an appropriate research design to correlate with the research questions as there are certain parameters in interpreting the results relating to each design.

### **4.5.1 The Data Production Techniques and Instruments**

In a qualitative study, there is a variety of data gathering tools that can be used. The instruments used in this study for data production were face-to-face semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and school records.

#### **4.5.1.1 Interviews**

An interview can be defined as a conversation between the researcher and the respondent (Burgess, 1982). It is a structured conversation where the researcher has prepared questions on a particular topic to elicit information from the respondent. Semi-structured interviews gave the researcher a comprehensive understanding of parental involvement. The interview schedule used was an open framework (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The study consisted of open ended interview questions which contained thirteen questions for parents. An audio recording of the interviews were done and transcripts of the interviews were compiled. It must, however, be noted that the responses were to a certain extent constructed as the conversation unfolded and knowingly or unknowingly, some respondents may have adapted their answers according to who the interviewer was. Thus power relationships can influence the flow of the interview. The researcher needed to take cognisance that her position may have influenced the response of the interviewee.

The researcher's role in the interview was to initiate conversation by posing questions to the participants contained in the interview schedule. The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher the flexibility to deviate slightly from the interview schedule, although maintaining the same context of questioning.

#### **4.5.1.2 Questionnaires**

A questionnaire is a list of questions that need to be answered by the respondent (Boynton and Greenhalgh, 2004). Questions contained in the questionnaire can be in the form of open-ended or closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions



involve the respondent to choose from given possible answers. Open-ended questions on the other hand, allow the respondent the freedom and flexibility to answer the questions as he or she pleases or deems fit.

The questionnaire for the purpose of this study consisted of 13 open-ended questions for parents. The open-ended questions allowed the participant to feel more relaxed as there were no right or wrong answers or the presumption of any specific answer (Terre Blanche and Kelly, 1999). Questions were rephrased when necessary, in order to facilitate a clearer understanding between the researcher and the participants.

#### **4.6 The Research Site**

This study was conducted in a public primary school located in Isipingo, Durban. The school is in existence for fifty years now. It is close to many informal settlements and close to the bus, taxi and rail stops. Hence, learners come from far and wide to get a quality education. Most of the learners are English second language speakers. This is also true of most parents who do not have a good command of the English language.

Majority of the learners are raised by guardians and only see their biological parents once a month or once every quarter. Thus, it is the guardian that is responsible for the development of the child academically, emotionally and physically in the absence of the biological parent. The researcher has included the data collected from three guardians so as to make the sample more representative of the parent population at the school in Isipingo.

Most of the learners come from low socio-economic backgrounds. The parent component consists of many guardians, single parents, and illiterate parents. Many working long hours and only come home during the weekends. A high percentage of the parents do not have a high level of education and parental involvement in education is lacking, if not, non-existent.

Due to these pre-existing challenges of parents as partners in education, the researcher is confident that the findings of this study will positively impact on the status quo at the school. It is hoped that parents will get a better understanding of what is expected of them and teachers will get more insight into the attitudes of parents in respect of the different types of parental involvement as outlined by Epstein *et al.* (1997). This study may offer teachers and parents new strategies with which to address the issue of parents as partners in the education process.

#### **4.7 Sampling**

Sampling involves making decisions about which events, settings, people or behaviour to observe. In this study, the sample, which refers to the participants in the research, was chosen by means of purposive sampling where the researcher was specific about whom to include in the sample.

The sample in purposive sampling comprises of a specific group, knowing clearly that this group in no way represents the population at large and there is no attempt to make generalisations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). This kind of sampling is used for convenience where the researcher has easy access to the sample. Cohen *et al.* (2000) argue that the purposive sampling method is mostly suitable for small scale research and less complicated to set up and is considerably less expensive.

The school used in this study was selected by means of purposive sampling because the level of participation varied from parent to parent. The researcher only involved one primary school and this cannot be representative of all schools in South Africa. This study, however, aimed to assist the community and to transform their lives. The researcher chose three biological parents, three guardians and three teachers who are parents, from the same school. Although all nine participants are parents, henceforth, the three biological parents will be referred to as Parent A, B and C. The three guardians will be referred to as

Guardians A, B and C. The teachers who are parents, will be referred to as Teacher A, B and C, for easy reference and to maintain anonymity.

#### **4.8 Validity and Reliability**

In order to collect valid and reliable data one must make sure, prior to the commencement of the research, that the measurement instruments and the measurement procedures to be used have high levels of reliability and validity.

Reliability and validity are two of the most important concepts in the process of measurement (De Vos, Delport, Fouche and Strydom, 2011). Reliability refers to the administration of the same instrument (or very similar instrument) on different occasions, within the same conditions, yielding consistently the same (or similar) results. Test validity is the extent to which inferences on the basis of numerical scores are appropriate, meaningful and useful (Adcock, 2001).

Key (1997) maintains that the initial step in ensuring validity of a qualitative research is for the researcher to be a good listener. Thus, allowing the data to emerge from the participants. This was one of the strengths of this study that enhanced its validity.

To ensure a high degree of reliability and validity in this study, the questionnaires were scrutinised and edited by experts from the Cluster of Education Studies and the Discipline of Educational Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). Pilot-testing ensures that any mistakes in respect of the questionnaire can be rectified in due course and only then should the questionnaire be implemented in the study. A pilot-test was undertaken on a colleague that did not form part of the sample in the study. The researcher was satisfied with the responses received in the pilot-test and felt confident that the questions were all relevant and would yield valuable data.

Feedback in terms of the data collected is often cascaded to all participants.

Interview transcripts were given back to the participants to allow them to verify the accuracy of the transcribed information. Lacey and Luff (2001) refer to this as respondent validation.

Trustworthiness is a concept used for qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). According to Guba's (1994) model of trustworthiness, as explained by Key (1997), there are four criteria namely, transferability, dependability, credibility and conformability. The researcher tried at all times to maintain trustworthiness in this study. Each interview was recorded to ensure that all the information was captured and transcribed accurately.

#### **4.8.1 Triangulation**

The data gathering methods and instruments used in this or any other study are important and need to be given careful thought as it enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of its findings (Adcock, 2001). The term triangulation basically refers to the gathering of data from a number of different sources. This allows the researcher to assess if the data that is collected from one source confirms supports or contradicts data received from other sources. Triangulation can also take place within one specific data collection instrument by phrasing the same question in more than one way. In this way the researcher can ascertain whether the participant is answering the two questions in a similar manner. The researcher used this strategy with the following two questions:

1. *"How much of time (on average per day) do you spend with your child/children? "*
2. *"How involved are you in your child's education? (Please explain)"*

Both these questions were included to gauge the extent and consistency of the parents' involvement.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), the researcher's use of multiple methods of triangulation, is an indication of attempting to elicit a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being questioned. The researcher used a

sample comprising of parents, teachers and guardians as it is representative of the site in which the study was conducted.

#### **4.8.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Participants are more willing to engage in conversation and give honest feedback if they know that their identity would be protected. Researchers also use pseudonyms in place of school names and respondents' names. The researcher in this study referred to the three biological parents as Parents A, B and C, the guardians as Guardians A, B and C and the teachers who are parents as Teachers A, B and C.

The name of the school was also withheld and only referred to as a primary school in Isipingo. The aim of the study was clearly outlined so that respondents were fully aware of what the research process would entail. The respondents were also made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point if they had a valid reason for doing so. They were treated with a great sense of dignity and respect. The information gathered was treated confidentially.

#### **4.9 Analysing and Presenting Qualitative Data**

This process examines what the researcher does with the data that has been produced. It generally involves a three-fold response, namely, the researcher needs to analyse the data, interpret it and thereafter, present the analysis.

##### **4.9.1 Data Analysis**

Qualitative data basically involves textual or visual data. Data analysis happens after all the data has been collected. Analysis involves a close or systematic study, or the separation of a whole into its parts, for the purpose of study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative researchers involve themselves in the integration of the operations of organising, analysing, and interpreting of data and call the entire process "data analysis" (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993, p.486).

Qualitative data analysis can take two forms, namely, inductive and deductive processes. The inductive process involves organising data into categories and identifying patterns or relationships amongst the categories (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993, p.479). Most of these patterns and categories emerge from the data and is influenced by the researcher's ideologies.

At other times, the researcher may have a clear theoretical framework before the study and use this to analyse the data. This would be a deductive approach.

Data analysis began when all questions were answered in the interview. Miles and Huberman (1994, pp.10-11) define data analysis as consisting of three flows of activity that takes place at the same time:

- Data reduction
- Data display
- Conclusion drawing and verification

Data reduction takes place throughout the study where the researcher is constantly selecting, simplifying, abstracting, focusing and transforming data that exists in written notes or transcripts. All interview transcripts were read over and over again to gain a general sense of the data gathered.

Data display is an organised, summarised or compressed compilation of information that allows the researcher to draw conclusions and act on it. Graphs, charts, networks or tables can condense copious notes into simplified displays of information.

Conclusion drawing and verification, however ironic as it may sound, is initiated at the beginning of the study when the researcher starts drawing conclusions as soon as the data starts gathering. This is when patterns and relationships are noted and possible explanations offered. These conclusions, however, should only be finalised once the analysis is complete.

#### **4.10 Ethical issues and considerations**

Ethical considerations are a vital aspect of any qualitative study which involves engaging with living organisms. Humans, being used as subjects of social science studies bring about many unique ethical problems that would not usually arise in the clinical laboratories involved in natural science studies. Therefore, researchers in the social sciences should be wary of collecting and obtaining data at the expense and detriment of human beings (De Vos *et al*, 2011).

Ethics is generally concerned with what is right and wrong or good and bad. The researcher needs to abide by necessary procedures in order to protect the interest of the participants when undertaking research. There is, however, some degree of disagreement when defining what is ethically correct in research (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993).

The crucial consideration is for the researcher to maintain non-maleficence which refers to the researcher not doing any harm to the participant or to any person involved in the research (Gillon, 1994). In an attempt to engage in ethical practices, the researcher in this study embarked on the following ethical practices:

1. A copy of the Research Proposal was sent to the Ethics Committee at University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus) for consent and approval. Only once this was obtained, did the researcher continued with the study. A copy of the Ethical Clearance is attached (Annexure A).
2. A copy of the Research Proposal was sent to the Department of Education for permission to conduct the research study at a primary school in Isipingo. A copy of permission from the Department of Education is attached (Annexure B).
3. Consent was obtained from the principal in writing after she was furnished with all the relevant information regarding the purpose and focus of the

study, the procedures to be followed and the participants involved. A copy of permission from the principal is attached (Annexure C).

4. The anonymity of the school and that of all the participants were protected.
5. An information letter including details of the identity and background of the researcher, the purpose of the study and how data will be collected, together with consent forms, were given to all participants. They were also informed in this letter that they could withdraw themselves from the study at any time. A copy of the letter of consent to all participants is attached (annexure D).
6. The process of interviewing, audio recordings and transcripts thereof, were made, with the consent of all participants.
7. A letter of thanks and appreciation was sent to the principal, for allowing the research to be conducted at the school.

#### **4.11 Limitations of Research**

The researcher is a teacher at the site and tried to be as objective as possible as she engaged with the data. Furthermore, it is most likely that the participants' responses were also affected by the fact that the researcher is a teacher at the site. Power relationships can influence the flow of the responses from participants, especially the parents and guardians.

Majority of the participants are first language isiZulu speakers. The questions were administered in English and it is likely that some participants did not fully understand the questions and this may compromise the quality of their responses.



The study involved a limited number of participants from one site. The researcher is fully aware that this sample is not representative of the wider population. The researcher has no intention of generalising the findings.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology used in investigating parental involvement in a primary school in the Isipingo area. The data production techniques used in the research was discussed. The researcher indicated how the study abided by necessary procedures in order to protect the interest of the participants when undertaking research and declared a few limitations the study may have been subjected to.

The following chapter discusses the findings of this study in the light of the theoretical framework that underpinned this study and relevant literature.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter explained the research methodology used in this study. This chapter presents the findings of the study and the data analysis using a thematic approach. Dey (1993) maintains that data analysis involves separating data into constituent parts to reveal its characteristics, structure and elements. Furthermore, data should be broken down into smaller parts to expose how these parts interact and interconnect (Dey, 1993).

#### **5.2 The Use of Thematic Analysis**

Content analysis is the accepted method of investigating texts, particularly in mass communication research. Thematic analysis is similar but pays greater attention to the qualitative aspects of the material analysed. The roles played by theory and coding in such analyses are highlighted (Joffe and Yardley, 2004). It is the Eco-systems Theory and the Theory of overlapping Spheres that undergird this study. Both these theories emphasise the role of the parent and community in the development of the child. Once again, reinforcing the African tribal maxim that it takes a village to raise a child (Robert, 2008).

A theme refers to a specific pattern found in the data in which one is interested. It may be directly observed or easily visible in the information and this is referred to as identification at the manifest level for example, the term 'stigma' is used. Another level of identification is in the latent level where a theme exists but not so visible for example, in a case where stigma is implied by comments about not wanting others to know about an attack of panic or epilepsy.

Thematic analysis is popular amongst researchers and students in many different disciplines (Attride-Stirling, 2001). It is a process whereby qualitative information is encoded. A Thematic Approach involves identifying a pattern in the information that at the least describes and organises possible observations or at the most provides an interpretation of the phenomenon. The terms 'code' and 'theme' are used interchangeably (Boyatzis, 1998).

Furthermore, a theme may be generated inductively from the raw data collected or deductively from theory and prior research. No theme can be entirely inductive or data driven because the researchers' knowledge and preconceptions will inevitably influence the identification of themes (Joffe and Yardley, 2004).

Theoretically derived themes allow the researcher to replicate, extend or refute prior discoveries (Boyatzis, 1998). A key dilemma facing an analyst or researcher is whether to 'test' theory or to explore new links (Joffe and Yardley, 2004).

Thematic analysis has many different uses that may actually overlap. Boyatzis (1998) postulates that thematic analysis can be used as follows: a way of seeing; a way of making sense of seemingly unrelated material; a way of analysing qualitative information; a way of systematically observing a person, an interaction, a group, an organisation or a culture and a way of changing qualitative information into quantitative data.

Thematic analysis provides a tool for increasing communication in ways that can be beneficial to the researcher. Denzin and Lincoln (2003), concur that thematic analysis can be seen as a bridge between various fields and disciplines. Results can be made more communicable to others when one adopts different ways of organising and presenting them (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Thus, thematic analysis results in a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

Boyatzis (1998), however, suggests three major obstacles in the effective implementation of thematic analysis in research. He cited the following obstacles:

- Researcher's projection
- Sampling
- Mood and style

Due to a researcher sometimes being too familiar with the phenomenon, like in the case of this study where the researcher is a teacher at the site, it becomes difficult not to pre-empt or expect own responses to a situation. Furthermore, with ambiguous qualitative information there exists a greater chance of projection from the researcher in this type of research.

Sampling can be another obstacle as there is no guarantee that a researcher would get more valuable information with bigger sample units. As a result the researcher can never be totally confident that the sample chosen is going to yield the expected results.

Finally, with regard to mood and style, qualitative research is known to be very subjective. The researcher's state of mind, patience and clarity on the understanding of the phenomenon may negatively affect the ability to effectively undertake thematic analysis.

Taking these obstacles into cognisance, the researcher was however still confident that the Thematic Approach was the most appropriate way to interpret the data collected. The researcher's intention in this study was to either reinforce or refute the findings of the following two theories: Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Eco-systems Theory and Epstein's (1987) Theory of overlapping Spheres.

### **5.3 Characteristics of participants**

The parent, as defined by SASA (DoE, 1996), is a learner's natural or biological parent; a learner's guardian or legal custodian or any person who undertakes to act as a parent of a learner for the purpose of the learner's education at school.

For the purpose of this study, although all nine participants are parents as defined by SASA (DoE, 1996), they are referred to as: Parent A; Parent B; Parent C; Guardian A; Guardian B; Guardian C; Teacher A; Teacher B; and Teacher C. for easy reference and identification. Hence nine interviews were undertaken and analysed. The questions contained in an interview schedule were administered to all nine participants.

### 5.3.1 Biographical and other Information

The researcher used the same questionnaire to elicit information from all the participants. The biographical and other data requested by the first part of the questionnaire is contained in Table 1. This serves to compare the parents on a number of variables of interest, namely: gender; number of children in school; level of education and job description.

Table 1 **SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES**

<b>Summary of Participants' Responses to Question 1, 2 and 3.</b>				
		Q1	Q2	Q3
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>No Of Children</b>	<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>Job Description</b>
<b>Parent A</b>	Female	2	Grade 11	Lighting Technician
<b>Parent B</b>	Female	2	Grade 11	Domestic Worker
<b>Parent C</b>	Male	1	Grade 12	Truck Driver
<b>Guardian A</b>	Female	4	Grade 8	Unemployed
<b>Guardian B</b>	Female	2	Grade 10	Machinist
<b>Guardian C</b>	Female	1	Grade 8	Home-Industry
<b>Teacher A</b>	Female	2	Honours in Ed.	Educator
<b>Teacher B</b>	Female	4	B.Ed Management	Educator
<b>Teacher C</b>	Male	1	B.Ed Honours	Educator

The presentation and discussion of the remainder of the data will be organised under the following themes or headings:

- Parents' understanding of parental involvement

- Challenges or barriers impacting on parental involvement
- Strategies that can be used to promote parental involvement

Since the themes are directly observed in the information collected, identification is done at the manifest level. In addition, the themes are generated deductively by the two theories that undergird this study, namely, Eco-systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and the Theory of overlapping Spheres (Epstein, 1987). Both these theories assist in the understanding of the parental involvement phenomenon and postulate the need for partnership and interaction between parents and teachers in education.

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) explanation of the Ecological theory, clearly maintains that no child can develop in isolation. It is the contribution of parents, school and community that develops a child holistically. Epstein's framework of six major types of involvement offers clarity on different ways in which parents can get involved (Epstein *et al.*, 1997). These two theories complement each other in reinforcing the need for a partnership in education and the different ways that parents can involve themselves.

The ideology of shared responsibility between the teacher and the parent formed the basis of this study. The researcher's focus was to explore the participants' understanding of parental involvement; the challenges that may impact on parental involvement and the strategies that can be used to promote parental involvement.

All of the data collected was analysed according to the following themes:

#### **5.4 Theme One: Participants' understanding of parental involvement**

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Eco-systems Theory, no individual can exist in isolation and needs the constant support from the environment. In relation to this study, the child needs the constant support and guidance of teachers as well as parents to perform at his or her optimum. Therefore, it is imperative that parents

have a sound understanding of what parental involvement entails and the different types of involvement that the parents can engage in.

All participants in this study provided varied understanding of the concept of parental involvement. This finding is in support of Fishel and Ramirez (2005) who maintain that parental involvement is a multi-dimensional rather than a homogeneous construct. This is evident in the different responses received from participants on parental involvement:

Parent A: *“Helping your child whenever you can in every way possible. Their school work, at home and just building the child as a whole”*

Parent B: *“I understand that when they got a programme with the class teacher at school, I can ask them what is happening. I can see I can deal with that what is happening. What they don’t like and their behaviour and attitude. Helping them with assignments, projects or homework”*

Parent C: *“Parents should frequently ask the children if they are finding anything difficult at school and try to help them as much as possible. Go to school meetings to learn more about your children and their behaviour at school. Discipline them accordingly. To love them and motivate them. I know I am saying all this but I wish I had the time to do all of this but I know that my wife does”*

Guardian B: *“For the parents to get involved in the governing body and help the school and the children. They must check with the teachers about the children’s behaviour and school work. Help the children with homework and make sure they learn for the exams. To go to school meetings”*

Epstein (1995) outlined six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. However, the responses from the participants reveal that their understanding is limited to parenting, communicating and learning at home.

Guardians A and C were of the opinion that parental involvement was concerned with feeding, clothing and making sure that their children attend school every day. Their responses were:

Guardian A: *“Involvement? Parental? I have to feed them. I have to check that their clothes are clean and their behaviour and they go at school every day”*

Guardian C: *“For the parents to help the children with their work. To make sure they have books or the computer to do their assignments and projects. To check if they are having any problems in their school work and to help them. To go to school meetings and check with the teacher on his marks. Pay the school fees and support them in the education. Making healthy food and loving them. Making sure that they are not joining bad friends and doing wrong things. I don't let him go out too much because his parents are not here to see him and I am responsible for him. He must listen and be good”*

Almost all of the participants in the study agreed that their role as a parent in education is to share responsibility with the school in terms of educating their child. Thus reinforcing Epstein's (1995) view that the most effective model of parental involvement is that which promotes partnership between parents and schools.

Participation and partnership, however, seems more prevalent amongst the teachers towards their children's scholastic performance. The researcher attributes this to the fact that all three teacher participants have gone on to attain post-graduation degrees. This in itself is indicative of the value that these teachers as parents attach to education. Their responses were as follows:

Teacher A: *Being fully involved with your children, be it education or any other extra-curricular activity that they may be participating in. Motivating, encouraging and coaching your children to do their best. Telling your children when they are wrong and be clear of what you expect as a parent in their school work and in terms of their behaviour. Parents must also compliment their children when they are good.*



Teacher B: *It is a stressful time for us as parents because there's so many things that you need to do for your children, most importantly, sparing your time for them, teaching them in terms of homework, daily living, the good and bad of how to grow up and how to behave. There are so many things involved in being a good parent that is concerned about their children.*

Teacher C: *Absolutely important in order to get the children on the right path. Supervising, checking, monitoring and watching over school work and homework. Communicating with the school and the teachers in respect of your child's progress and offering assistance to your child in whichever way you can.*

According to the Eco-systems Theory, the family and school form part of the microsystem which is the layer closest to the child and has a significant impact on the socialization and development of the child. This theory further postulates that if the relationships within the microsystem breaks down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of the environment (Donald *et al*, 2006).

It is therefore crucial for schools and teachers to develop a strong and sustained relationship with parents. However, this can only be made possible if both parents understand exactly what is expected of them in terms of support for the children at home and at school. This is evident in the fact that the three teachers have a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of what is expected of them as parents. The researcher attributes this to the fact that as teachers, they know exactly what support they expect from their learners' parents. Furthermore, the fact that all teacher participants have gone on to attain post-graduation degrees is in itself indicative of the value that these three parents attach to education.

#### **5.4.1 Communication is crucial in parental involvement**

It was interesting to note that almost all participants cited communication as their understanding of parental involvement. Parent B stated "*I can ask them what is happening ...what they don't like*"

Parent C indicated that *“parents should frequently ask the children if they are finding anything difficult at school”*

Guardian C maintains that parents must *“check if they are having any problems in their school work and help them”*

From these responses it is clear that communication is seen as a vital component in parental involvement amongst teachers, parents and guardians. The need for two way communication between school and home seems to be shared by most of the participants. Guardian B states that *“they must check with the teachers about the children’s behaviour and school work”*

Teacher C explained that *“communicating with the school and the teachers in respect of your child’s progress”*

Equally important, is the communication between parent and child. According to Christenson and Sheridan (2001), parents’ expectations of their children need to be discussed and noted so that both the learner and teacher understand whether or not the parent will be satisfied with the learner’s scholastic performance.

Teacher A shares that parents should be *“telling your children when they are wrong and be clear of what you expect as a parent in their school work and behaviour”*

Department support is limited to policy yet lacking in practice. The researcher found that parents failed to mention the significant influence that leadership and staff at schools can have on parental involvement. School staff should be trained on how to communicate with parents and encourage parental involvement in schools (Lemmer, 2007). Clearly, Guardian A had no inclination of what parental involvement really entailed.

Epstein and Dauber (1993), agree that parental involvement increases when the management and staff of a school communicate a sincere desire to involve

parents by examining their needs. The revising and developing of the National Curriculum Statement has made it even more necessary for parents to be kept updated. Guardian B expresses her concern later in the interview when she says that *“there are so many new things and new subjects that we didn’t do in school and we must know about this new things like CAPS and ANA”*

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) saw parents as pupils who need to be educated on how and why they should become involved in their children’s education. This constant interaction between the structures is important for the child’s development. Bronfenbrenner (1986) makes reference to this as collaboration between school, parents and the community.

According to Christenson and Sheridan (2001), communication is one of the four main categories of parental involvement. Epstein’s (1995) framework of six major types of parental involvement includes communication as an important component. However, school staff needs to be wary of communicating mainly complaints to parents as this will give the learners more reasons to dislike school (Comer, 1992). Teacher A maintains that *“parents must also compliment their children when they are good”*

#### **5.4.2 Time spent getting involved**

Pugh (1987) identified dimensions to the different forms of parental involvement. He makes mention of non-participation, participation, external support, control and partnership. When parents were asked how much of time on average, per day, they spend with their child/children, their responses varied from half hour to three hours.

From the responses, it is evident that Parent C is a non-participant as he says *“Well, I drive at night. I come back home in the day and that’s when my child is at school. So the only time I have is the weekend. Most of the weekend I spend sleeping because I am so tired from the week. I think I can say about half an hour every week.”*

According to Green, Walker, Hoover- Dempsey and Sandler (2007), whilst some companies are lenient with taking time out, certain jobs leave parents exhausted at the end of the day to come home and help their children with school work. Parent C indicated in an earlier question that his child's mother checks and supervises homework.

It was interesting to note that when the researcher asked Parent C how involved his own parents were in his education, his response was: *"Well, my father used to work in Johannesburg so he wasn't there often and my mum used to take care of my younger siblings. She never really had time to look after me or check on my work. So, not a lot. She was too busy to worry about me or my school work"*

Clearly, it is like history repeating itself but his own child is actually better off because his wife seems to be quite involved in his child's education. Parent C may have emulated his parents approach to parenting and therefore does not see anything wrong in his non-participation.

Parent B explains that she works away and only gets back home fortnightly or monthly and as a result cannot get too involved in her children's education. Although she phones them daily she is a non-participant as described by Pugh (1987) because of the circumstances that she is faced with. She also indicated that in her absence, her mother and brother supervise and assist with homework. Similarly, her own parents *"were not involved, my father was working in the mine and my mother is always working"*

All three Guardians expressed difficulty in assisting with homework.

Guardian A expresses frustration that *"...I check their books but I can't understand English. I just ask them if they got homework and if they say yes, I ask them to do their work after they eat. I can't really help them 'cos I don't understand English"*

She explained in response to a previous question that her last born helps the children with their homework when he gets home from work.

Guardian B indicated that three hours are spent with the children and added that much of this time is spent cleaning and eating and *“after eating, I check if they have any homework and see if I can help them.”* Her response to another question as to how involved she really is in her children’s education, her response was: *“I try to be involved by checking on their work. I can’t go to parent meetings because it is in the day and my boss won’t give me off. I miss all the meetings. When I am off and I go to school to see the teacher they are busy and can’t spend time explaining all the things I need to know”*

Guardian C indicates that even though she spends two hours with her grandson, she does not seem to have control as she says *“he likes playing TV games and listening to music so he goes into his room.”* She added later that *“I make him sit with me after school and do his homework while I make my samoosas. I don’t know much about his work but at least I watch him do his school work in front of me. When it is exam time he can’t play his music and TV games, he must study hard. I can’t help him with his homework but when we found he was doing badly in Maths and Afrikaans, my son asked the neighbour in Matric, to give him tuition and his marks improved and he sleeps early. When his father calls, I tell him if he is listening or not. I attend all the parent meetings and check with the teacher all the time”*

Upon review of the biographical information it was found that all three Guardians are not highly educated. Guardians A and C attained a Grade 8 education and Guardian B attained a Grade 10 education. This reinforces the findings of a study by Delores (2000) in respect of Mexican-American parents in elementary school education which maintained that parents’ education level, attitude of school staff, language barriers and family issues are factors that influenced parental involvement.

Furthermore, Lee and Bowen (2006) add that parents who have low levels of education and as a result possess less cultural capital, tend to be less likely to be involved in their children’s education. They may lack confidence and hesitate to become involved or may even lack knowledge of the school system and educational developments. This is supported by an earlier response by Guardian

B who expresses concern that *“there are so many new things and new subjects that we didn’t do in school and we must know about this things like CAPS and ANA”*

This cultural capital is evident in the responses of Teachers A and B who spend more time with their children. Teacher C only spends one hour with his child every day but his wife is also responsible for assisting with their education. Their response as to their involvement in their children’s education is as follows:

Teacher A: *Very involved. We work through homework all the time; we drive them around to school meetings and tuition activities. So, lots of involvement with the school, the teachers and external tutors as well as sporting activities and with their coaches. Being a teacher myself, I check on the sections they need to cover in each term and revise with my children. I also make sure that their assignments and projects are done properly and handed in on time.*

Teacher B: *If I can tell you, I’m 100% involved. I check their homework daily, I test them on work they learnt. I make sure all projects are done properly. I take them to the library to get information and books to read.*

Teacher C: *Totally involved, we want to see them progress and pass, to get good symbols so we can see them to university. We guide the children and not do the homework for them but take them to the library, get the internet service, the relevant books, check their work and make sure it is done on time and done properly.*

Green *et al.* (2007) concurs that parents’ own level of education will determine whether they are sufficiently equipped with the skills and knowledge to become involved in the different types of parental involvement. The fact that the Teachers are all highly educated, understand what is expected of them in terms of parental support and are committed to their children’s education, is indicative of the fact that they possess the cultural capital to do so (Lee and Bowen, 2006).

The remaining parents can be seen as participants who involve themselves with control and partnership (Pugh, 1987). Even though the duration of time spent with their child/children varies on average per day, they all engage in some form of parental involvement on a daily basis.

#### **5.4.3 Why is it important for parents to become involved?**

Epstein (1995) maintains that partnerships between schools and parents have a myriad of benefits. It can improve communication between home and school, provide family support, improve the school climate but perhaps the most important benefit is the positive effect it has on the learners' academic progress.

All participants acknowledged the importance of parental involvement and their responses reinforce the varied benefits. Many expressed that their involvement may instil fear and the children will behave and work harder.

Parent A: *"...the child will be scared if he knows that his mother or father is checking on his school work and he will try and do it"*

Parent B: *"... if they know their parents are there to support them in everything, they may work harder"*

Guardian B: *"... so children are frighten and will do the right things"*

Guardian C: *"so that they do the right things. Parents should know when their children are joining the wrong company and misbehaving"*

Teacher A: *"...just to know that their parent is watching their progress instils fear in children"*

The other responses were that parental involvement will help determine whether learners are doing well or need help with their work. Parents can identify their children's strengths and weakness and even motivate and guide their children.

Parent B: *“... I can see what they need in school and help them”*

Parent C: *“to motivate their children to study hard and pursue a proper career”*

Guardian B: *“... to go to school meetings so that they know what is happening  
In the school work”*

Teacher A: *“For parents to make children understand the importance of  
education and how far they can go in life with a good education”*

Teacher C: *“... A child only knows what a child should know and we as  
experienced adults should be there to guide them in the right  
direction”*

The responses were varied but all expressed a positive influence on the learner.

The findings in this study support the literature reviewed in this thesis that purport that parental involvement is associated with higher academic achievement (Epstein, 1995, Gutman and Midgley, 2000, Senechal and LeFevre, 2002), lower drop-out rates (Rumberger, 1995), sense of well-being, attendance, grades, homework readiness, student attitudes, educational aspirations and academic achievement (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991).

Parent A, Guardian B, Teachers A, B and C shared that their parents were very involved in their own education. Interestingly, all of these participants are very involved in their own children's education. This suggests that parents emulate what they saw their parents do. Therefore, the more parents get involved in their children's life, the better the chances for future generations to take an interest in their children's education.

Parent A, B and C's understanding of parental involvement seems to be more limited to just being there for their children. Pugh (1987) refers to this as external support when they are not participating on the different levels of involvement as outlined by Epstein (1995). This may be due to the fact that parents are not



familiar with the need for parental involvement as outlined by Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres. This study has revealed that there is a definite gap in parents' understanding of parental involvement and the types thereof.

SASA (DoE, 1996) mandated the establishment of school governing bodies to develop effective partnerships between parents, communities and their schools. This is probably the most significant development by the Department of Education, thus far, towards getting parents more involved in education.

The fact that participation of parents on this level has become mandatory yet it was only Guardian B who made any mention about parents to "*get involved in the governing body and help the school and the children*" is concerning. According to Mncube (2005) many black parents lack insight and experience into school governance issues since they were not encouraged to get involved in school governance during apartheid times. Furthermore, a lack of training and knowledge can be seen as a contributing factor to their lack of participation. Lee and Bowen (2006) would concur that these guardians lack the cultural capital and therefore are less involved in their children's education.

The socio-economic status of the parent also influences the effectiveness of parental involvement and home-school partnerships (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski and Apostoleris, 1997). Parents from a low socio-economic environment, like six of the participants in this study, may not have fully understood the effects of parental involvement on scholastic achievement because of their own educational experience. As a result, their involvement may be non-existent or minimal. This unfortunately may impact the chances of their own children to succeed.

## **5.5 Theme Two: Challenges impacting on Parental Involvement**

As maintained by Christenson and Sheridan "there is still more rhetoric than reality about family and school working together as genuine partners" (2001, p. 18). Thirteen years later, nothing much has changed. The gap between what is said and what is done is referred to as barriers to parental involvement.

From the responses received from parents, it is evident that many barriers still exist.

#### **5.5.1 Time constraints and work commitments**

Most participants indicated that the lack of time was one of the main challenges hindering parents' involvement in education. This response is a direct reference to Bronfenbrenner's (1986) exosystem which consists of the larger social system within which the child does not function directly. This layer influences the child's development by interacting with some structures in the microsystem, for example, parents' work-schedule where the child is not directly involved but gets to be influenced by the effects of this action.

The fact that Parents A, B and C are working long hours or Teacher A has other important commitments, means that they do not have the time to get too involved in their children's education. Unlike Guardian B's boss who won't give her time off, other companies are lenient with taking time out. Certain jobs, like Parent C who works night shift as a truck driver, also leaves parents too exhausted at the end of the day to come home and help their children with school work (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2007).

Parent A, a single, working parent, understands the benefits of a home-school partnership. She relies on the school to inform her when her son is absent as he was caught bunking recently. He knows she has to work and does not have the time to check on him so he decides to stay at home sometimes. This partnership has given her peace of mind and instilled caution in her child as he is constantly being monitored by both the teacher and his parent. McBride (1991) supports this kind of interaction by saying that parents, who get more involved, develop a greater appreciation for their role.

#### **5.5.2 Financial constraints**

Grolnick *et al.* (1997) argue that parents from a low socio-economic environment

may not fully understand the effects of parental involvement on scholastic achievement because of their own educational experience; as a result their involvement may be non-existent or minimal.

Parent A, a single mum who gets no financial assistance from her children's father, has to "*work weekends to earn extra money to give her children the basic things*", thus her involvement in her children's education is limited.

Parent B is a domestic worker who works away from home, cannot help them even when she does go home. She cannot write and therefore cannot understand their work. She also does not have the financial means to get extra tuition for them.

Guardian A has four children to feed and is concerned that "*there isn't enough money to give them good food.*" According to Epstein's (1995) framework of six types of parental involvement, Guardian A was concerned that her responsibility in providing a balanced diet and proper nutrition was being hindered due to financial constraints.

This finding supports the view of Grolnick *et al.* (1997) who maintain that the home-school partnership depended on the socio-economic status of the parent or learner. They argued that if parents from low socio-economic backgrounds received the proper support, they may get more involved in their children's education and this may in turn benefit their children.

### **5.5.3 Social and cultural diversity**

The lack of participation amongst parents of culturally and socially diverse learners are also well documented (Clark 1983). This is a direct reference to Bronfenbrenner's (1986) macrosystem where the cultural values, laws and customs influence the child's development. Parental belief according to certain cultures is that survival skills are more important than educational attainment. Guardian A is an example of this belief where she is a granny looking after four

grandchildren and says “...*I have to look after them to give them some food, clothes and give them the love...*”

Parent C displays this kind of stereotypical attitude where the job of the father is the provider whilst the mother is the nurturer. This seems to be a practice carried through generations as his own father was out working whilst his mum looked after his siblings. Epstein (1995) refers to this as ‘Learning at home’ in his typology where schools need to get families more involved in learning activities at home.

#### **5.5.4 Parents level of Education**

A review of the biographical information reveals that the three teachers are highly qualified with each attaining post-grad degrees. Two of the three biological parents have completed Grade 11 whilst Parent c has gone on to complete his matric. The three guardians are not as highly educated with two of them completing Grade 8 whilst Guardian B has completed Grade 10.

Guardian A Green *et al.* (2007) maintains that parents’ own level of education will determine whether they feel sufficiently equipped with the skills and knowledge to become involved in different types of parental involvement.

Parent B: ... *Especially Maths and Science, I also don’t understand it.*

Guardian A : ... *I can’t help them with their school work because I can’t Understand English properly.*

Guardian B: ... *They are not doing well in Maths but I don’t understand It and can’t help them.*

Guardian C ... *My age makes all that I know about education so outdated. There are too many changes that I don’t understand like The new subjects like technology and ANA.*

Teacher B ... *If I had a better understanding of Mathematics, I could help them more.*

From these responses, it is apparent that parents require support with the subject matter taught as they are not equipped with the skills and knowledge to engage with their children. Most of the parent expressed difficulty in assisting their children with Maths. Schools need to identify the challenges by communicating with the parents and strategizing with the Department of Education and the school governing body to provide the support that these parents require.

### **5.5.5 Lack of Communication**

Communication is what Epstein (1995) encourages in one of her six types of involvement. Communication forms the basis of all interaction and partnerships. Schools need to ensure that parents are given the opportunity to communicate with teachers when necessary. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) stated that there needs to be a two-way communication between home and school. Bronfenbrenner (1986) makes reference to this ongoing communication as collaboration between the school, parent and the community. There are many ways in which communication can take place like parent-teacher interviews, meetings and workshops, message books, telephonic conversations, to name a few.

From the data collected, it was evident that parents' perception of their role in education focused on assisting their children with homework. Homework forms an important part of the education process of a child. It is important for parents to become involved in their children's homework as this creates a partnership between home and school (Epstein, 1995). Some participants expressed concern that they do not know how to help their children with homework. The onus lies on the school to provide parents with the support to minimise this challenge.

There are constant changes in the national curriculum and parents need to be kept abreast with these latest developments in order to be able to assist their children at home. Guardian B expressed concern that *"the letters they send to us is in English and does not explain CAPS and ANA clearly and why children are doing*

*this.*” Schools need to communicate to parents through a medium that is accessible to all parents. All written or oral communiques need to be sent in English and also translated into a language familiar to the majority of the parents, namely isiZulu.

The data collected revealed that the promotion of parental involvement at the school lacks structure and organisation. The School Governing Body can play a crucial role here, in establishing the needs of the parents. The Department of Education must also become involved in providing parents with the support they need. Parent meetings, which are the most common form of communication, can be scheduled to address these needs. These meetings according to Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) ecological theory are the most important mesolink between parent and schools (Lemmer, 2007).

The need for communication between parents and children about school and school related activities is crucial as it can shape the children’s attitude towards their education. Daily conversations about school related activities between the parent and child will reassure the child and shape his or her attitude towards his school work.

Guardian C is concerned that her grandson “*does not tell me when he is having a problem. Maybe he thinks I am too old to understand.*” Even though her grandson does not involve her in his school work, she tries to stay informed by attending the parent meetings but adds that “*the education is so different from my days, too many new subjects and new things.*” The school can explain to the grandmother how she can assist her grandson with his work.

Schools need to have a clear idea of what they expect of parents and be able to communicate this to the parents clearly in a language that they can understand. It is common practice for schools to schedule parent meetings during a school day, as is the case where the study had taken place. Due to work commitments, already discussed earlier, many of the participants are not able to attend these meetings.

One of the parents expressed concern that *“my boss won’t give me off. I miss all the meetings. When I am off and I go to school to see the teachers, they are busy and can’t spend time explaining all the things I need to know.”* Clearly, the school lacked support for working parents. The school needs to adopt an open door policy and provide parents with the opportunity to visit educators during the day, if they cannot attend meetings.

Furthermore, the meetings are conducted in English and three of the participants indicated that they don’t understand English well. This language barrier will not allow the parent to fully understand what was discussed at the meeting and as a result his or her interaction or involvement with the teachers and their own children will be limited (Delores, 2000).

Parents may also harbour negative feelings about home school partnerships when schools only initiate communication to complain about their children (Bermudez and Marquez, 1996). On the contrary, Guardian B is of the opinion that *“the school does not call to complain so I think they are doing all their work.”* This, however, may not always be true. To alleviate this misconception, it is important that there is constant two-way communication with parents and teachers reporting both positive and negative developments in respect of the learners. Home-school communication is a two-way process and reflects co-equal partnerships between family and school (Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) Eco-systems theory reinforces the need for constant interaction amongst the different structures. The bi-directional influences that the theory postulates, indicates that this interaction is beneficial to all stakeholders in education as each can learn from the other.

Epstein’s (1995) framework of six major types of involvement offers more clarity on different ways in which parents can get more involved. This theory and suggestions by Epstein can form the basis of remediation towards overcoming these barriers.

## **5.6 Theme Three: Strategies that can be used to promote parental involvement**

The benefit of parental involvement to all stake-holders in the education process is well documented (Epstein 1987, Rumberger 1995, Gutman and Midgley 2000). Even though parents and teachers may be familiar with these benefits, they may not have the insight on how to become more involved to improve the scholastic performance of the learner.

### **5.6.1 Steps that can be taken by schools**

It is evident from the participants' responses that this school lacks vital support structures to encourage parental involvement.

Epstein (1995) advocates schools collaborating with the community and co-ordinating the work and resources of colleges, universities, businesses, or communities and other groups to strengthen family practices, school programmes, student learning and development.

The participants suggested strategies that schools could implement to support parental involvement.

Eight of the participants stated that more meetings are needed by the school to keep parents updated on the latest developments in education. Guardian C was of the opinion that these meetings with parents should be done in smaller groups. Parent C suggested that more frequent meetings be held rather than once a year. Furthermore, the teachers need to get to know their learners better when giving feedback to the parents. One parent also suggested that the school governing body also meet with parents to share and impart knowledge on how parents can assist their children in education.

Guardian A agreed that there was a definite need for more meetings and schools needs a teacher or translator to explain in isiZulu as well. Another participant



added that these meetings need to be scheduled at a time that is convenient to those parents who are working, possibly in the evenings or weekends, to explain to us about CAPS and ANA.

Teachers also saw the need for parent meetings as a way to empower parents with the skills on how to assist their children with their education. One teacher expressed caution that schools should equip parents with the necessary skills to make a difference in their children's education instead of assuming that they know what is expected of them. Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) saw parents as pupils where they need to be educated on how and why they should become involved in their children's education.

Participants also suggested that schools engage in extra lessons in the weekends with learners and parents so that parents can also understand the work and be in a better position to assist their children with their work. From the responses, it is clear that English and Maths seem to be the problem areas. These extra classes can focus on these subjects.

Teacher A expressed concern about the apathy amongst parents and relates this to the fact that some of the parents are not well educated. She was of the opinion that Adult Basic Education Training (ABET) classes are needed to reinforce the importance of an education and get them more involved in reading with their children.

### **5.6.2 Steps that can be taken by Parents**

Participants give importance to the basic needs of the learner. Parents need to ensure that their children receive love, nutrition, exercise, encouragement and motivation as all of this will enhance their children's holistic development.

Parents need to be involved in the academic, emotional and behavioural development of their children. Constant communication with and monitoring of their children will enable parents to assess the type of friends he or she is associating with and the type of activities he or she is engaging in.

Too much of idle time is not good for children. Remember the old adage 'an idle mind is a devil's workshop' Parents need to encourage their children to get involved in extra-curricular activities and sport. This will also teach children to manage their time effectively.

Supervision of homework has been cited earlier as one of the most common forms of involvement parents engage themselves in. All of the participants suggested that parents should assist their children with projects, assessments, assignments, daily homework and preparation for tests and exams. This type of involvement on the part of the parents will enable them to ascertain their children's strengths and weaknesses. Most participants suggest that as soon as a weakness is identified, it is the responsibility of the parent to arrange for extra tuition from the teacher, a neighbour, a tutor or even the parents themselves to assist their child in gaining a better understanding of his or her problem area.

This close monitoring of homework also gives the child a sense of accountability and caution that he or she needs to answer to a parent if the homework is incomplete or adequate preparation is not done for a test or examination.

Ongoing communication and not only when there is a problem, has been stressed by the participants. Communication between home and school is as important as communication between parent and child. One participant also mentioned that parents should network with other parents in order to discuss parenting skills and learn from each other.

The regular attendance at parent meetings is imperative. If, however, a parent is unable to attend, he or she must make contact with the school telephonically or by appointment, to get an update on what was discussed and information about his or her child's progress and behaviour. Even parents living away must phone the school regularly to check on their children. This interest on the part of the parent will serve to instil caution in the learner and may even motivate him or her to strive for better results.

Three of the participants mentioned that parents need to become involved in the School Governing Body and if they have the time, they can help with relief teaching.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The responses indicate that parents were fully aware of the benefits of parental involvement in education. Biological parents' and guardians' insight into the different types of parental involvement however, was limited. Teachers displayed a more comprehensive understanding of the different types of involvement parents' can engage themselves in, probably because of their involvement in education.

Results have shown that the school lacks support structures and strategies to develop a meaningful partnership between home and school. The challenges impacting on parental involvement were identified. Suggestions were made by all participants on strategies that could be used to promote parental involvement.

Thus, the following chapter will serve to provide recommendations as to how to get parents more involved in their children's education.

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This final chapter includes a summary of the findings of the study and a discussion thereof. Furthermore, it will present recommendations based on the findings.

The aim of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. What are parents' understandings of parental involvement?
2. What are the challenges impacting on parental involvement?
3. What strategies can be used to promote parental involvement?

The findings of this study will be beneficial to all stakeholders in education for the following reasons:

- To create awareness amongst relevant departmental officials, school staff, parents and the wider community of factors that can promote parental involvement.
- Schools can use the information from this study to formulate strategies to encourage and support parental involvement.
- Parents will have a clearer understanding of their important role as partners in education.
- Barriers to effective parental involvement will be highlighted.

- Schools can do some introspection on current practices of parental involvement and identify areas that require improvement.
- Recommendations will be made on how to overcome barriers in order for parents to develop and sustain partnerships with the school.

## **6.2 Main findings of the Study**

This study aimed to explore the role of parents as partners in the education process. The findings reveal that the parents' understanding of their role as partners is limited. It was found that parents were more involved with parent-child communication and less involved in actual activities relating to home-school networking as outlined in Epstein's (1987) Theory of overlapping spheres.

Collaboration between teachers, school, parent and community in terms of increased communication has been found to be crucial to successful parental involvement as outlined by Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Eco-systems Theory. The data suggests that parents did not display an in-depth understanding of what parental involvement entails as compared to the three teachers who have presented a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of parental involvement.

Parents are aware of the benefits of parental involvement; however, schools must teach parents how to become more involved (Walkerdine and Lucy, 1989). It is clear from the teachers' responses that parental involvement has a positive effect on education that is the reason why teachers are committed to their own children's education. According to Epstein (1987), educators who form partnerships understand the learner better. This may be the reason that drives teachers to become more involved in their own children's education.

The study also aimed to explore why parents are not taking an active role in their children's education and to find ways to overcome these barriers. The lack of

community becoming involved in teacher development programmes and the restricted nature of the school curricula were cited by Casanova (1996) as two reasons why all of Epstein's levels of parental involvement may not be fully achieved. Fifteen years later, nothing much has been done to close the gap commonly known as barriers to parental involvement.

Financial constraints (Grolnick *et al*, 1997), parents' educational level (Delores, 2000), work commitments and time constraints (Finders and Lewis, 2002; Weiss *et al*, 2003) were some of the barriers that formed part of the participants' lack of involvement. According to Singh *et al* (2004), in South Africa, significant levels of parental involvement is not a reality as majority of the children went home to parents who were unable to assist them educationally.

Lastly, the study aimed to find possible ways to overcome these barriers. Epstein and Voorhis (2001) suggest that schools have considerable power to respond effectively to increasing parental involvement. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2006) add that even though the Department has mandated parents' role in governance, it still remains the responsibility of individual schools to encourage, promote and manage parental partnerships in education. The lack of effective strategies of communication between the school and home in this study, also suggests that more effort needs to be made by the school to enhance parental involvement.

Many teachers hold positive attitudes about involving parents in education (Lawson, 2003) but few receive training on how to develop these collaborative practices. This important strategy needs to be pursued.

### **6.3 Summary of findings**

There is sound theoretical and empirical support for the important role that parental involvement plays in the learners' scholastic achievement. Bronfenbrenner (1986) reinforces this two-way communication when he makes mention of bi-directional influences of involvement where the parent, teacher and learner are each

influenced by the other. Parental involvement in education has been associated with higher grade-point averages (Gutman and Midgley, 2000), lower dropout rates (Rumberger, 1995) and increased achievement in reading (Senechal and LeFevre, 2002) amongst other positive outcomes.

The findings of this study confirmed the important role of parents as partners in the education process and revealed the following regarding parental involvement in this study:

- Parents are aware of the positive effect of their involvement on scholastic performance, yet they lack the knowledge on the different ways in which they can get more involved.
- Teachers' understand the need for parents as partners in education and as a result get involved in their own children's education.
- Most of the participants have not pursued their studies beyond grade eleven and it is difficult to make them understand the value of parental involvement.
- An understanding of the many barriers identified in this study will enable educators and other stake holders to plan and strategize on how to increase and improve parental involvement and in so doing, close the gap.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

A valuable finding of this study was that parents understand the positive effects that parental involvement may have on their children. However, they lack the knowledge of how to foster the interdepending and overlapping relationships as outlined in Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Eco-systems theory and Epstein's (1987) Theory of overlapping spheres, respectively.

The work of Joyce Epstein (1995) has helped in the progress of theories, research, policies and practices of parental involvement in schooling. She believes that the onus lies on the school to encourage parental involvement and reinforce the different ways that parents can become involved in the education process.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made for schools to increase the level of parental involvement:

- Schools need to promote communication (Epstein *et al.*, 1997), positive interaction and support to parents and teachers. According to Ibrahim and Jamil (2012) language and communication problems were some of the factors that made parental involvement almost non-existent. Thus, translators may be used, if necessary, to make parents aware of what is expected of them and how they can enhance their children's learning.
- Families that do not have telephones or cell phones need to be made aware of meetings and developments in respect of their child's education. Schools can make use of the local radio station or the free community newspaper to cascade important information.
- The Department of Education needs to put policies and practices in place to build trust between the parent and other stakeholders. A written school policy is essential to manage parental involvement in education (Maphanga, 2006). Trust is an important contributor to increased parental involvement (Lawson, 2003). In this way parents will feel more comfortable to get involved.
- Pre-service and in-service teacher training needs to be introduced on how to get parents involved. Schools rarely offer training to staff to collaborate with parents (Lemmer, 2007). All staff and school management teams should be focused on enhancing parental participation. Narain (2005) advises that schools assign one educator to oversee all duties concerning



parental involvement. A home-school coordinator may be trained to develop ongoing programmes, based on parental needs, to strengthen partnerships.

- Parent meetings need to be held at convenient times and venues so as to accommodate as many parents as possible.

The findings and recommendations of this study reinforce the importance and benefits of a partnership in education between home and school as “parent participation is a cost-effective and feasible way to improve the culture of teaching and learning so needed in South Africa” (Lemmer, 2007, p. 227)

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# ANNEXURE A

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE



21 October 2013

Mrs Deviasagrie Padayachee (8420984)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0825/013M

Project title: The role of parents as partners in the Education process: A case study at a Primary School in Isipingo

Dear Mrs Padayachee,

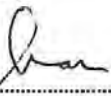
### **Expedited Approval**

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Acting Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Mr Henry Muribwathoho  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr MN Davids  
cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

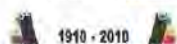
Dr Shenuka Singh (Acting Chair)






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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

## ANNEXURE B

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (DEPARTMENT)



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Tel: 033 341 8610

Ref.:2/4/8

Deviasagrie Padayachee  
54 Sir Kurna Reddi Road  
Cairwood  
4032

Dear Mr Padayachee

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DōE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **THE ROLE OF PARENTS AS PARTNERS IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS: A CASE STUDY AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ISIPINGO**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education:

Isipingo Primary School

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 19 November 2013

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa

PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004 Fax: 033 392 1203

EMAIL ADDRESS: [kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za); CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363;

...dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty

WEBSITE: [www.kzneducation.gov.za](http://www.kzneducation.gov.za)

## ANNEXURE C

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (PRINCIPAL)

30 April 2013

#### **The Principal**

I am undertaking a research project on "the role of Parents as partners in the Education process". Therefore, it will be highly appreciated if you could read this document, sign the declaration below and email it as an attachment to my email address: [sagree.silvers@gmail.com](mailto:sagree.silvers@gmail.com) or fax it to telefax: 031 9022196.

The research will aim to influence the way in which parents participate in their child's education. South Africa, like any other developing country is urged to conduct studies of this nature in order to critically evaluate and improve parental involvement and interaction in education. Therefore, this study will aim to provide valuable information on how parental involvement can influence a child's academic progress.

The sample will comprise of 9 parents: 3 biological parents; 3 guardians and 3 teachers who are parents. The interview process will be used to gather necessary data.

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#### **Please take note of the following issues:**

1. There will be no limit on any benefit that the participants may receive as part of their participation in this research project.
2. Participants will be expected to answer all questions from interview schedule.
3. They are expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect his/ her personal opinion.
4. Their identity will not be divulged under any circumstances.
5. There are no right or wrong answer.
6. All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
7. An audio recording of each interview will be made and the transcript thereof will be signed by each participant to verify its authenticity.
8. The participant will not be under any circumstance forced to reveal what they don't want to reveal.
9. The participants will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.
10. No instruction time will be compromised whilst undertaking this research project.

This research study is supervised by Dr. S. Ntombela. Her telephone number is (031) 2601342 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and her email address is [ntombelas1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ntombelas1@ukzn.ac.za).

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**Thank you for your support, co-operation and valuable time.**

**SAGREE PADAYACHEE**

University Of KwaZulu-Natal

Tel: (031) 9201000

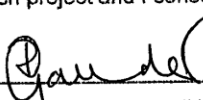
Cell: 0847458377

Email: [sagree.silvers@gmail.com](mailto:sagree.silvers@gmail.com)



Please sign the following declaration and include your full name(s) as indicated:

I, MRS Rajes GOVENDER (full name(s) of Principal)  
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the  
research project and I consent to engaging in the research project.

  
SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL

15/07/2013  
DATE

## ANNEXURE D

### **LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT TO ALL PARTICIPANTS**

30 April 2013

Dear Participant

I am undertaking a research project on "the role of Parents as partners in the Education process". Therefore, it will be highly appreciated if you could read this document, sign the declaration below and email it as an attachment to my email address: [sagree.silvers@gmail.com](mailto:sagree.silvers@gmail.com) or fax it to telefax: 031 9022196.

The research is influencing the ways in which parents participate in their child's education. South Africa, like any other developing country is urged to conduct studies of this nature in order to critically evaluate and improve parental involvement and interaction in education. Therefore, this study will aim to provide valuable information on how parental involvement can influence a child's academic progress.

**Please take note of the following issues:**

1. There will be no limit on any benefit that the participants may receive as part of their participation in this research project.
2. Answer all questions.
3. Respond to each question in a manner that will reflect your personal opinion.
4. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstances.
5. There are no right or wrong answer.
6. All your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
7. An audio recording of each interview will be made and the transcript thereof will be signed by each participant to verify its authenticity.
8. The participant will not be under any circumstance forced to reveal what they don't want to reveal.
9. The participants will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

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This research study is supervised by Dr. S. Ntombela. Her telephone number is (031) 2601342 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and her email address is [ntombelas1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ntombelas1@ukzn.ac.za).

**Thank you for your support, co-operation and valuable time.**

SAGREE PADAYACHEE  
University Of KwaZulu-Natal  
Tel: (031) 9201000  
Cell: 0847458377  
Email: [sagree.silvers@gmail.com](mailto:sagree.silvers@gmail.com)

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**Please sign the following declaration and include your full name(s) as indicated:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (full name(s) of participant)  
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

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SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

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DATE

## ANNEXURE E

### PARENTS AS PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

The purpose of this schedule is to gather information relevant to Parents as partners in the Education progress. The assumption is that both parents as well as teachers need to come together to make their shared contributions to the academic progress of the learner.

Parental participation encompasses a broad spectrum of activities which seek to bring together the domains of home and school. The information being sought by this interview is for research purposes only. Confidentiality of information will be maintained and respondents are not asked to identify themselves by real names. A pseudonym may be used. Please provide as much accurate information in response to each question as possible.

#### QUESTIONS FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS:

1. How many of your children are attending school?
2. What is **your** level of education?
3. What work do you do?
4. How much of time (on average per day) do you spend with your child/children?
5. Who is responsible for supervising your child/children's homework?
6. What do you understand by parental involvement?
7. Why do you think it is important for parents to become involved in their child/children's education?
8. When you were growing up, how involved were your parents in your education?
  - 8.1. Do you think their involvement had any effect on **your** academic performance?
9. How involved are you in your child's education? (Please explain)
10. From your experience as a parent, what factors/challenges have hindered **your** participation in your child/children's education?
11. What do you think is the impact of those challenges on children's education?
12. Is there something **schools** can do to facilitate parental involvement?
13. What can **parents** do to become more involved?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

